

A KACHIN CHRISTIANITY:  
BIRTHING KACHIN ECOFEMINIST THEOLOGY BY INTEGRATING KACHIN  
INDIGENOUS RELIGION WITH PROCESS THEOLOGY

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## ABSTRACT

### A KACHIN CHRISTIANITY: BIRTHING KACHIN ECOFEMINIST THEOLOGY BY INTEGRATING KACHIN INDIGENOUS RELIGION WITH PROCESS THEOLOGY

The Kachin people have been taught by the American Baptist missionaries to put aside their traditional religion along with their cultural elements—Nat worship. Along with the British colonization, the dualistic teachings and the patriarchal and hierarchical theology of the missionaries made Kachin Christians view all other non-human things and beings as objects for the benefit of human beings. The combination of patriarchy and negative aspects of women causes Kachin women to become double victims of exploitation. Ecofeminist theology, by integrating Kachin indigenous religion with process theology and postcolonial feminist theology, is a Christian theology Kachin people can see to develop a Kachin ecofeminism.

The Kachin people have been facing the challenges of colonization, Americanization, Bamarnization, globalization, deforestation, wars, militarization, and the socioeconomic impoverishment of women. What is the most fruitful and beneficial way to respond to ecological crisis, gender concerns and increased violence in today's Kachin land? The integration of process theology with Kachin indigenous Nat worship is crucial to develop a Kachin concept of *Karai Kasang* as Goddess—relational, panentheistic, non-hierarchical, non-patriarchal, non-dualistic, and transcendent-immanent *Karai Kasang*. A Kachin ecofeminist-process-Nat worship spirituality can, therefore, overcome the hierarchical dualisms combined with a mechanistic worldview: the domination of men over women and humans over nature, as well as can solve the environmental problems and the dangers of sex trafficking to deforestation to poverty.

To

My most beloved wife

*Kai Rin Dumhpau*

and

Our two lovely daughters

*Sophia Ja Nang Awng Lahtaw*

&

*Evangelina Ningja Rawng Lahtaw*

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## INTRODUCTION

“Everything has some value for itself, for others, and for the whole... Also, no unit can separate itself from the others, and from the whole. And yet, each unit exists in its own right. It upholds value intensity with the universe.”

— Alfred North Whitehead, *Modes of Thought*

“If dominating and destructive relations to the earth are interrelated with gender, class, and racial domination, then a healed relation to the earth cannot come about simply through technological ‘fixes.’ It demands a social reordering to bring about just and loving interrelationships between men and women, between races and nations, between groups presently stratified into social classes, manifest in great disparities of access to the means of life.”

— Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Gaia and God*

The country of Myanmar<sup>1</sup> is a pluralistic society—multi-ethnic, multi-religious, and multi-cultural. There are over 135 different ethnic groups, who speak different languages and dialects with different cultures and traditions. The Bamar is the major ethnic group with many minorities, such as the Kachin, Kayah, Kayin, Chin, Mon, Rakhine, and Shan. The majority religions are Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism,

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<sup>1</sup> Myanmar is a Burmese word for the name of the country. It was formerly known as Burma, which is the anglicized form of “Burmese,” the major group of the country. The military government changed the official name of the country from “Burma” to “Myanmar” on June 19, 1989. I use “Myanmar” as the name of the country and “Burmese” as the people of Myanmar as a whole. Myanmar is located in the western portion of mainland Southeast Asia and shares its borders with China, India, Laos, Bangladesh, and Thailand. Its populations are over 55 million (July 2017 estimation); Bamar 68%, Shan 9%, Karen 7%, Rakhine 4%, Chinese 3%, Indian 2%, Mon 2 %, Kachin 1.5%, other 5%. Based on 2014 national census, there are Buddhist 87.9%, Christian 6.2%, Muslim 4.3%, Animist 0.2%, Hindu 0.5%, other 0.2%. For more information about Myanmar, see Central Intelligence Agency, “Burma,” in *The World Factbook* <https://web.archive.org/web/20180928025025/https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bm.html> (accessed September 24, 2018). See also Mg Htin Aung, David I. Steinberg, and Michael Arthur Aung-Thwin, “Myanmar,” in *The Encyclopedia Britannica* <https://web.archive.org/web/20180928025556/https://www.britannica.com/place/Myanmar> (accessed September 24, 2018).

Confucianism, Judaism, Taoism, Sikhism, and the indigenous religion called Nat worship. In the past, missionaries taught the Kachins to put aside their traditional beliefs. Looking at the religious background of Kachin Christianity<sup>2</sup> from my theological perspective, instead of neglecting their traditional religion, Nat worship, the Kachin people have a God-given diverse cultural heritage and invaluable religious practices through *Nat Jaw Nawku Htung*—Nat Worship.<sup>3</sup>

## Problems

The Kachin people are taught by missionaries, particularly American Baptist missionaries, to believe that to be a Christian, one must be free from the indigenous religion, Nat worship, and abandon all cultural elements, both positive and negative, along with the Nats. There are many positive or life affirming cultural elements in Nat worship that should be maintained and preserved for the interrelations of men and women, humans and earth, humans and the divine, and the divine and the earth, such as the concept of Goddess, creation narrative, language, costumes, dances, poems, respect of nature, and so on. But, looking from the perspectives of Christian ethics and women's rights, there are also many negative or life rejecting cultural elements that discriminate against women and girls, such as polygamy, polygyny, slavery, drinking alcohol and using tobacco, patriarchal family structure, bride-price system, free sex custom, and so

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<sup>2</sup> According to some sources, 99% of the Kachins are Christians. See Kallie Szczepanski, "Who are the Kachin people?" *ThoughtCo*. <https://web.archive.org/web/20180928025733/https://www.thoughtco.com/who-are-the-kachin-people-195178> (accessed September 24, 2018).

<sup>3</sup> The term *Nat* originally means a "lord" and evolved into idea similar to feudal over lordship. A *Nat* is a "spirit," who has some dominion over a group of people or over a certain object. Since the Kachin people instinctively believe that Nats are innumerable and there are a number of different Nats, I prefer to use the word Nats in plural form representing all the Nats in general.

forth. In addition, the dualistic teachings and the patriarchal and hierarchical theology of the missionaries taught Kachin Christians that all other non-human things and beings as just instrumentals or objects for the benefit of human beings. However, the ecological crisis and discrimination of women have challenged Kachin Christians to rethink the place of nature in the whole structure of Christian theology. Thus, concerning ecology and discrimination against women in the Kachin context, Kachin Christians have to depart from their traditional reading of the Bible and misunderstanding of nature. They have to be conscious that entirety of nature is overseen by God and the Holy Spirit and that the traditional ideas of *Karai Kasang* and the Nats are helpful.

The Kachin land is rich in natural resources, including timbers, minerals, and gems. However, deforestation has devastated the lands and bamboo, and many varieties for all kinds of trees have been cut down for the benefit of private communities and companies. The natural resources and the nature of Kachin land have been exploited and polluted by the rich and the powerful. This has resulted in severe poverty and powerlessness of the majority of the people in today's Kachin churches and caused the destruction of community, depletion of natural resources and many kinds of pollution, such as air pollution, water pollution, and soil pollution.

The problems of ecology in today Kachin land can be applied with the popular Kachin ecological song entitled *A Ka Law*, meaning "It hurts."<sup>4</sup> This song represents the ecological problems that have been transpiring in Kachin land. Images of barren

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<sup>4</sup> The Kachin word "*A Ka Law*" means the groaning sound when something or someone is seriously hurt and very intense. This song was composed by Awng Lum, the young Kachin pop singer and it was produced by their own Band, *The Blast*, in 2010. The video can be found at Blast Kachin, "A KA LAW" (It Hurts)," YouTube Video, 4:00, March 12, 2010, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vzeKAhmaIdM>.

land are found throughout the video, highlighting the deforestation as well as lack of water across their land. Towards the end, the artists begin to rebuild the land, with rain coming down as a sign of blessing. The words “Who will come to save?” are repeated twice throughout the song, signaling a call to *Karai Kasang*, the Goddess to come and save, which shows the need for process-ecofeminist theological change for I advocate.

AKA LAW!  
(IT HURTS!)<sup>5</sup>

*Anhte ginra hta Karai hpan da*  
It is our land, the creation of Goddess

*Tsawm la ai shingra tara*  
How beautiful the nature/the creation it is

*Yu gawn lajang na kadai n nga*  
There is no one who cares

*Hkrup mara zingri hkrum*  
It has been exploited and raped

*Ah... ah... ngu... ngu...A Ka Law...*  
*Ah...ah...Ooh...Ooh...it hurts....*

*Bum shagawng ni hkrap nga*  
The mountains are crying

*Nam maling ni hkrap nga*  
The forests are crying

*Maisak mailung ja lungseng ni hkrap*  
Teaks, Trees, Jades, Diamonds, Rubies are crying

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<sup>5</sup> Zau Sam and Rafael Reyes III, “Response of the Kachin Nat Worshipers to Present Ecological Concerns” (A midterm project presented at the Eco-Process Theology Class, Claremont School of Theology/Claremont Lincoln University, October 10, 2011).

*Hkashi hkanu hkrap nga*  
The rivers, the brooks are also crying

*Dusat ni mung hkrap nga*  
The animals are also crying

*Du hkra ladaw shanan ni yawng hkrap*  
All the seasons, the environment are crying

*Kadai je la na*  
Who will come to save?

*Ngu... ngu... ah... ah...A Ka Law..*  
Ooh...Ooh...ah...ah...it hurts...

*Ana zinli ni law wa*  
More diseases come out

*Taw matsan ai ni jat wa*  
More drought more poverty

*Htenza nga shingra tara majaw*  
Everything is destroyed by the natural disasters

*Kadai je la na*  
Who will come to save?

*Ah... ah... ngu... ngu...A Ka Law..*  
Ah...ah...ooh...ooh...it hurts....

This song describes the present state of the Kachin land. There was a gradual move from a people who revered the Kachin land and only used what was necessary for survival, to a people who exploit the Kachin land for economic growth, and the resources that the Kachin land has developed. Part of this problem has been the move from an animistic to a monotheistic religion, in which the Nats were grounded in the land, the rivers, the mountains, and the animals. In order to navigate to an ecological worldview, there must be a similar reverence for the land, a return to an animistic-like nature where the trees, mountains, and rivers speak. The turmoil that now exists can be

thought of a curse placed on the Kachin people precisely because they have forgotten the Nats and destroyed their home. There are no more Nats; they have no place to live on the land. All that remains are remembrances of what once was.<sup>6</sup>

Analytically speaking, one of the root causes of the ecological crisis is the Christian religion itself. Many Kachin Christians think of environment as only for their own business and development. In spite of their past, when the people in the time of Nat worship thought highly of nature and did not spoil the forests, their respect for nature dwindled when they substituted Nat worship with Christianity. Consequently, along with the mass destruction of nature, Kachin women became victims of exploitation. The ecological problem correlated with the exploitation of women in the form of poverty and sex marketing. As women are identified with nature, the explorations of ecology and feminism bring together and discover how human domination of nature and male domination of women are interconnected. Women are the primary sufferers of the environmental degradation, such as deforestation, soil depletion, pollution, and poverty.

Furthermore, in the Kachin families, husbands are like the masters of their wives and all other family members. Wives are like servants to their husbands. Before husbands get up, wives must rise and prepare everything that is necessary for husbands, for instance, preparing water to wash her husband's face, toothpaste, napkins, coffee, etc. Wives must not sleep before their husband sleeps. When wives speak to their husbands, they must first sit humbly in front of their husbands before they start talking. Wives have the responsibilities of the kitchen, laundry, taking care of the children, etc. Wives are also considered to be primarily for child bearing. Wives have no authority to talk back to their

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 11-12.



husbands.<sup>7</sup> Daniel K. Zau Nan, a Kachin theologian and scholar, claims that Kachin women, in this sense, are indoctrinated to feel as second-class citizens in society, and as a result, an inferiority complex is transmitted among women from generation to generation. Worst of all, many women feel that this patriarchal structure is not a problem. This patriarchic social system can be seen in many Kachin families and churches even today.<sup>8</sup> Rosemary Radford Ruether says, “in many societies, beating one’s wife is considered to be a husband’s right, upheld by custom and religious law. Unfortunately, women in many societies expect to be beaten and endure this throughout their marriage.”<sup>9</sup> This shows that the Kachin churches have been facing the problems of polygamy and abusive monogamy. Women’s leadership roles in the churches and in the community are also limited and women’s ordination is still a burning issue in today’s Kachin churches. It can be clearly seen that the problems are the current crisis and the missionary Christian (sexist) theology that support those crises.

#### Description of the Outline of the Dissertation

What kind of Christian theology should Kachin people have to develop a Kachin ecofeminism? This dissertation is focused on the field of ecofeminist theology by integrating Kachin indigenous religion with process theology and postcolonial feminist theology. This constructive theology for the Kachin people must be inclusive of various non-Christian religious traditions and methods of liberation in which Kachin women

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<sup>7</sup> Daniel K. Zau Nan, “Exploring Feminist Issues in the Kachin Churches,” *WAYS: MIT Journal of Theology* vol. 13 (2012): 188. Rev. Daniel K. Zau Nan is a lecturer in Mission at Myanmar Institute of Theology, Yangon, Myanmar. He is currently doing his Ph.D. in theology and religion at Liverpool Hope University, UK.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Integrating Ecofeminism, Globalization, and World Religions* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005), 30.

participate as equal and fellow proprietors of freedom and justice. By integrating these sources, the Kachin people can develop their own ecofeminism that promotes an ecospirituality of justice and earth healing in today's Kachin land. Kachin traditional beliefs can be integrated with process and ecofeminist theologies to develop a Kachin ecofeminist theology promoting an ecospirituality of justice and earth healing in today's Kachin land. I explore theological answers in the process-relational feminist perspectives in light of Kachin Nat worship. A Kachin ecofeminist theology is to be constructed by making new connections between the positive elements of Christianity and the positive elements of the indigenous religion—Nat worship. To this goal, the classical Christian concept of men over nature and women will also be transformed using process theological non-hierarchical, non-patriarchal, and non-dualistic notions. Then I propose to reenvision *Karai Kasang* as Goddess and finally to build up an ecospirituality of justice and earth healing in today's Kachin land. In the quest for the liberation of Kachin women from sufferings and struggle, it is necessary to rebirth *Karai Kasang* as the Goddess.

In Chapter One, I analyze how the history of Christianity impacts the Kachin Nat worship. The American Baptist mission came at the same time as the British colonization. Thus, British colonization and Christianization became a synonymous process in the eyes of the people of Myanmar. The British colonialism was political colonization whereas the American missionaries was a cultural and religious colonization, what I call "Americanization." I explore only what the Kachin people gain and lose by the American colonization in terms of culture and religion. I then reflect theologically to the conversion of Nat worshippers to Christianity. I argue against the

American Baptist missionaries for their negative approach to Nat worship and illuminate how classical Christian theology imposes on women and nature. I also discuss the *Hpu Ja* (bride-price system) and *Nla Dap* (free sex custom) that relate to the impacts of the polygamous marriage and abusive monogamy. I also examine the impacts on Kachin women's ordination theologically and socio-culturally. It is obvious that the pre-Christian hierarchical and patriarchal social structure of Kachin society combined with the dualistic and patriarchal teachings of the missionaries have blocked the ordination of Kachin women.

Chapter Two focuses on the exploitation of nature and women in Kachin land, the present ecological crisis and impacts of globalization. Deforestation has devastated the Kachin land and bamboo and all kinds of trees have been cut down for the benefit of private communities and companies. The natural resources of Kachin land have been exploited and polluted by the rich and the powerful. This has resulted in severe poverty and powerlessness of the majority of the people in today's Kachin churches and caused the destruction of community, depletion of natural resources and air pollution, water pollution, and soil pollution. I discuss how the mass destruction of nature and ecological problems created women to become victims of exploitation demonstrated by poverty and sex marketing. Women are the primary sufferers of the ecological crisis because women are identified with nature. I argue that the combination of patriarchy and subordination of women cause Kachin women to become double victims of exploitation.

Chapter Three explains the Kachin concept of God—*Karai Kasang* and the Whiteheadian God. I discover how the process theology could help Kachin people find a deeper and better understanding of non-hierarchical, non-patriarchal, panentheist, and

relational God. In the Kachin concept of Nat worship, *Karai Kasang* is both transcendent and immanent, who empowers and exists within the whole creation. This matches the Whitehead philosophy of organism. Similar to the Whiteheadian God, the Kachin concept of *Karai Kasang* develops through the integration of the primordial and consequent natures. I also use some Whiteheadian concepts of God as relational, transcendent-immanent, universal parents, which fit well with the Kachin concept of *Karai Kasang*.

In Chapter Four, the Kachin concept of Ecology in Nat worship is discussed. As the Kachin concept of ecology is rooted in Nat worship, I mention the Kachin creation narrative, the beginning of Nat worship, the different types of Nats, and the faith and practices of the Kachins in Nat worship. Then, I discuss the subjective immortality of the Nats by using Monica A. Coleman's ideas of the ancestral immortality regarding the integration of the Kachin concept of Nats with process theology. I apply Coleman's ideas of subjective immortality and the continual existence of the ancestors. Coleman combines the objective immortality of Alfred North Whitehead and Marjorie Suchocki's concept of subjective immortality to articulate the importance of the role of the ancestors, who are actively involved in the contemporary processes of becoming in African traditional religions.<sup>10</sup> Coleman's application of subjective immortality could help Kachin people understand the subjective immortality of the *Gumgun Gumhpai Nat* (the ancestral Nats) as the Nats continue to live and experience themselves in *Karai Kasang*. Then I discuss how the *Matse Nat ni* (the malevolent or evil Nats) works within a Whiteheadian metaphysics.

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<sup>10</sup> Monica A. Coleman, *Making a Way Out of No Way: A Womanist Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 107.

In Chapter Five, I emphasize how postcolonialism shapes the Kachin people's understanding of religion and race conflict in light of the present civil war between the KIA (Kachin Independent Army) and the *Tatmadaw* (the Burmese Army) and its impacts on women and ecology. I also suggest how postcolonial liberation theology could help decolonize the Bamarism and build Kachin postcolonial feminist theology. For Kachin liberation theology to decolonize the Bamarism, the Kachin churches need to participate in the liberating works of Christ. Seeing Jesus Christ as the Kachin indigenous ritual figures—*Hpan Ningsang Chye Ningchyang*, *Shagu Hkungga*, and *Jaiwa-Dumsa* could be a liberating Christology for the Kachin people. I find Mary Grey's relational theology of atonement is beneficial for Kachin women to connect the blood sacrifice of Nat worship with a particular reading of Jesus on the cross with the feminist critiques of sacrificial blood atonement. I also respond to the impacts of colonialism and globalization on Kachin women from a perspective of postcolonial feminist theology. Kwok Pui-lan develops a postcolonial thought through the lens of a feminist theology, particularly Third World/Asian feminist theologies.<sup>11</sup> I use Kwok's critiques of how colonization has always involved the exploitation of natural resources, and green imperialism seeks to control and privatize basic necessities of women in Kachin land. I also discuss how Maria Lugones's insights are helpful for a Kachin decolonial feminism—the possibility of overcoming the colonality of gender, as a way of understanding the oppression of Kachin women who have been subalternized through a combined racialization of Bamarism, colonization of British imperialism and American missionaries.

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<sup>11</sup> Kwok Pui-lan. *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005).

In Chapter Six, I elaborate how to portray the Kachin concept of *Karai Kasang* as Goddess in order to create a Kachin ecofeminism. I apply Rosemary Radford Ruether's views of how the three classical creation stories—Babylonian story, Hebrew story, and the Greek (Platonic) story—shaped “the classical systems of patriarchy that were being codified and functioned to sacralize relations of dominations.”<sup>12</sup> The way she reads the Genesis creation story in light of ecofeminist theology is a major ground for my rereading the Kachin creation narrative. I incorporate Kachin traditional beliefs into Christianity to help heal the relationship between men and women, humans and nature. I discuss how Sallie McFague's *the Body of God* and Ruether's *Gaia and God* can work together to promote process ecofeminist theology. I also explore how McFague's body of God and Ruether's Gaia are related in terms of panentheistic body. McFague understood ecocentrically that this understanding of God's love transforms our relationship to nature because the Earth itself, Gaia, is the body of God.<sup>13</sup> McFague's metaphorical theology could help Kachin people to see the universe as the body of *Karai Kasang* as Gaia in a sense of ecocentric theology.

I also use the notion of process theology's panentheism to portray *Karai Kasang* as a Goddess who is in the world and the world is also in *Karai Kasang*. I apply Christ's idea that “God sympathetically feels the feelings of every creature and the world”<sup>14</sup> to *Karai Kasang*. Chung Hyun Kyung discusses that, through her experience of *han* (painful/injustice feelings/sufferings) in the colonial and patriarchal oppression, the Asian

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<sup>12</sup> Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1992), 15-16.

<sup>13</sup> Sallie McFague, *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 18-19.

<sup>14</sup> Carol P. Christ, *She Who Changes: Re-imagining the Divine in the World* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 208.

feminist theology originates in the struggle and the search for the liberation of the poor Asian women.<sup>15</sup> I also discover how Chung Hyun's feminist liberation theology and Christ's feminist process theology are connected in terms of Goddess as process relational God. I also consider insights from Saw Hlaing Bwa, Jay McDaniel, Marti Kheel, Brian Henning, Paul Waldau, Peter Singer, Tom Regan, Karen Warren, Maria Mies, and Vandava Shiva that help to refine my vision of a Kachin ecofeminism.

Finally, in Chapter Seven, I imply the constructive Kachin Christian theology of monogamous marriage and the ordination of women for the Kachin Baptist churches. I reconstruct the theology and marriage and family to rule out polygamy and abusive monogamy in our Kachin Christian context. I assert to retain the good things and eliminate the bad of *Hpu Ja* and *Nla Dap*. I also argue that women's ordination is biblically sound and theologically supported. The starting point would be to revive the concept of women's ordination for Kachin women by revisiting *Nat* worship to apply the practice of "*Kumba Shalai Ai*" (passing the blood-stained elephant grass by the bride) and re portraying the women as *Jaiwa-Dumsa*, the High Priests. I then offer the next steps to promote and advance women's ordination among the Kachin Baptist churches.

Toward this goal, I try to integrate the many aspects of Kachin *Nat* worship with process theology, postcolonialism, ecofeminist theology, and non-Christian religious traditions to enrich the Kachin process-ecofeminist spirituality in the Kachin context. I discuss how patriarchal theology legitimized both the oppression and domination of nature and the existence of hierarchical relationships among all beings.<sup>16</sup> I criticize the

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<sup>15</sup> Chung Hyun Kyung, *Struggle to be the Sun Again: Introducing Asian Women's Theology* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1993).

<sup>16</sup> Ivone Gebara, *Longing for Running Water: Ecofeminism and Liberation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 16.

traditional dualistic understandings of nature, male domination of women and of nature as no longer effective for today's Kachin churches. I find a new set of symbols and language that transform the interrelations of men and women, humans and earth, humans and the divine, and the divine and the earth. This study, therefore, will be most significant for today's Kachin churches, the pastors and ministers, church leaders and thinkers in developing an ecofeminism which is much deeper and more dynamic in their Kachin land where men and women, humans and nature are mutually interdependent, mutually interrelated, and mutually interconnected and one within the web of "interbeing."<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> This term "interbeing" is the interconnected state of things that are constantly churning out of new connections, new possibilities, new problems, and new life. Thich Nhat Hanh, a modern practitioner, scholar, and populariser of Zen Buddhism, introduces it and translates it from *sunyata* more freely but more engagingly as *InterBeing*. Thich Nhat Hanh, *Interbeing: Fourteen Guidelines for Engaged Buddhism*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 1988). Also see Paul F. Knitter, *Without Buddha I Could not be a Christian* (Oxford: One World Publications, 2009), 12.



## CHAPTER ONE

### THE HISTORY OF CHRISTIANITY IMPACTS ON KACHIN NAT WORSHIP

It is undeniable fact that British colonization and the American Baptist mission came to Myanmar during the same period of time. The country of Myanmar was a British colony from 1824 to 1948.<sup>18</sup> According to Edmund Leach, a British Social Anthropologist, the British first came into political contact with the Kachin people around 1824.<sup>19</sup> The first American Baptist missionary, Adoniram Judson, arrived on July 13, 1813 in Yangon, Myanmar.<sup>20</sup> Eugenio Kincaid was the first American Baptist missionary who came to the Kachin land in 1830s. The British colonial rulers tried to incorporate the works of American Baptist missionaries into their administrative framework with the hope that their colonial mission might better affect several sectors of the Kachin people. The Kachin people also came to feel that to be Christian is to be American. Even long after the independence in 1948 and the retreat of the missionaries in the 1960s, a system of Americanization has been continued to thrive. The Kachin people have influenced by American thought, philosophy and life style. Therefore, today's Kachin Christians are to be considered practicing American Christianity instead of Kachin Christianity.

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<sup>18</sup> David I. Steinberg, *Burma/Myanmar: What Everyone Needs to Know* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 26-27.

<sup>19</sup> E. R. Leach, *Political Systems of Highland Burma: A Study of Kachin Social Structure* (Oxford: BERG, 2004), 41.

<sup>20</sup> Courtney Anderson, *To the Golden Shore: The Life of Adoniram Judson* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1987), 167.

#### A. The Impacts of Western Patriarchal Missionaries along with British Colonization

In the colonial period, Christianization and colonization became a synonymous process in the eyes of the people of Myanmar. The reason for identifying American Baptist missionaries and mission with the agents of the British colonization is because the American missionaries took political protection and financial support from the British. They did see the British conquest as God's providential chance for the expansion of the Christianity. In his book, *Open Veins of Latin America*, Eduardo Galeano claims that "the sword and the cross marched together in the conquest and plunder of Latin America, and captains and ascetics, knights and evangelists, soldiers and monks came together in Potosi to help themselves to its silver."<sup>21</sup> Galeano's idea is also true in Myanmar context that not only missionaries but also the first Christian converts took their sides with the British soldiers in fighting against the Burmese independence movement. In fact, for the Buddhist nationalists, the American Baptist missionaries, their new converts, and the British intruders were of the same group with different brands that worked together for the same colonial scheme known as "the white men's 3-M scheme, which means Merchant, Military, and Missionary."<sup>22</sup>

Critically speaking, most of the missionaries who brought the Gospel into the Kachin land were the Americans sent by the American Baptist Foreign Missionary Society.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, it is more appropriate to say that the Americans or Americanization

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<sup>21</sup> Eduardo Galeano, *Open Veins of Latin America: Five Centuries of the Pillage of a Continent*, 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary ed. (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1997), 20.

<sup>22</sup> Samuel Ngun Ling, *Communicating Christ in Myanmar: Issues, Interactions and Perspectives* (Yangon: ATEM, 2005), 35.

<sup>23</sup> To trace the beginnings of Baptist contacts with the Kachins, it was started by the American missionary Eugenio Kincaid, who first came to the Kachin land. Kincaid arrived in Myanmar in 1830 and left for America the last time in 1865 at the age of 68. See Herman G. Tegenfeldt, *A Century of Growth: The Kachin Baptist Church of Burma* (South Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1974), 77. However, it was four decades before any actual work was undertaken among the Kachins. Brief visits to Bhamaw by the

rather than the imperialism of Westerns or Westernization religiously and culturally colonized the Kachins. Even though the Christian colonization came along with the British colonialism, the British colonialism was merely political colonization whereas American missionaries colonized both culturally and religiously. Since the majority of Kachin people became Christians, they have been Americanized culturally and religiously rather than by British imperialism. However, we can conclude that both British colonialism and Americanization have different purposes, but on the same colonial system.

Looking at the mission methodology of the American missionaries, they used not only the method of “proselytization” but also the way of “cultural colonization,” called “Americanization.” The British government fully supported, for instance, nationwide educational works of the American Baptist mission, employing some missionaries in their respective mission fields as inspectors of schools. In this sense, many Buddhists identify Christians with anti-Buddhist, pro-British, pro-American, and even traitor to the nation. In a typical Burmese Buddhist context, to become a Christian means to become a foreigner and to abandon his or her Buddhist identity. They also thought of Christianity as a remnant of the British colonization that could rise again to exploit the nation culturally and politically.

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missionaries—A. Taylor Rose, Francis Manson, and Josiah N. Cushing challenged with the opportunity for beginning the mission among the Kachins. It was not until the arrival of Josiah N. Cushing in December 1876 in Bhamaw that the actual efforts to bring the Gospel to the Kachins commenced. The first missionary couple assigned from America for working among the Kachins was Mr. and Mrs. Albert J. Lyon who arrived in Bhamaw on February 13, 1878. Tragically, within a month after his arrival at Bhamaw, Lyon passed away due to a fever. Only the Kachin Baptist Mission to 1914 was largely woven around the lives of three dedicated and strong-minded pioneer missionaries—William Henry Roberts, Ola Hanson, and George J. Geis.

The Americanization has impacted not only positively, but also with a loss of culture. Positively, it is a very good thing that the American missionaries cut off some cultural elements, such as the constant use of rice-wine (strong alcohol), chewing of tobacco and betel nuts, practicing free-sex custom—*Nla Dap*, polygamy, arranged and levirate marriage, which has hindered the development of the Kachins and would not be able to help them in their venture to a new life in Christ. These were bad because most Kachin people drank the native rice-wine that habitual drunkards were found everywhere. Most men and women, including children chew betel-nut, tabacco, cutch, lime, and several kinds of narcotic leaves that made a filthy babit and mess with their teeth.<sup>24</sup> *Nla Dap*, polygamy, arranged and levirate marriage were the taboos that led the subordination of women. The Kachins have greatly changed their living conditions in terms of new religion, education, and lifestyle and this is what they gained from the missionaries. However, there are more disadvantages than advantages.

From a negative standpoint, the missionaries regarded all the forms of Kachin indigenous religion, Nat worship, as the bloody demon-worship or the evil religion. The missionaries claimed that the Kachin people were extremely superstitious and savages. The Kachins, then, gradually came to believe that all their cultural elements belonged to the culture of evil or life rejecting culture. Finally, all the Kachin cultural elements were thrown away along with the Nats by the missionaries, such as the non-dualistic concept of God, creation narrative, language, costumes, dances, poems, and respect of nature. They were replaced with dualism and Christian patriarchy. Heather Eaton claims that the mechanistic worldview reunited with the hierarchical dualisms. In addition to the

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<sup>24</sup> Ola Hanson, *The Kachins: Their Customs and Traditions* (Rangoon: American Baptist Mission Press, 1913), 55.

hierarchical dualisms “(superior/inferior, reason/emotion, mind/body, culture/nature, heaven/earth, spirit/matter, divine/demonic, and man/woman),”<sup>25</sup> the mechanistic worldview added more, such as “reason/nature, human/nature (non-human), rationality/animality (irrational), public/private, subject/object, logic/chaos, production/reproduction, power/powerless, father (male)/others, civilized/primitive (savage, animal), enlightened/unenlightened, master/slave, and universal/particular.”<sup>26</sup>

As a result of these dualistic teachings and the patriarchal and hierarchical theology of the missionaries, Kachin Christians came to see all others, including non-human things and beings as just instruments or objects for the benefit of human beings. The missionaries had imposed upon the Kachin people their American culture. For example, the missionaries taught that wearing the Kachin traditional costumes was not sophisticated and taught them to wear “suit and necktie.” They taught the Kachin people to act like them in the way of American living style—how to dress, how to eat and drink, how to sing, and dance, like the Americans. The Kachins, thus, are given the Gospel manufactured by the “American cultural factory” and enjoy it with American style. Yet the fact remains that Kachin Christianity does not have a very clear sense of its own self-identity. Moreover, the Kachin churches are both religiously and culturally deformed—Kachin on the outside, but American on the inside. The Kachin people have been struggling with a hybridity of colonial identity as a form of American cultural imperialism. In *Postcolonial Theory*, Leela Gandhi argues that “...celebrations of hybridity generally refer to the destabilizing of colonized culture. The West remains the

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38 <sup>25</sup> Heather Eaton, *Introducing Ecofeminist Theologies* (London: T & T Clark International, 2005),

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 57.

privileged meeting ground for all ostensibly cross-cultural conversations.”<sup>27</sup> For the Kachin people, considering American missionaries as colonizers, the American culture remains the privileged meeting ground for all cultural aspects of life. The arrival of American Christianity severely affected not only the Kachin people’s perception of the world but also brought a lot of changes to all aspects of the lives of the entire creation.

Every Kachin should value and maintain wearing traditional costumes, like variegated turban and trousers (for males), the silver and jewelry dressings (for females). This does not mean the Kachins have to completely avoid wearing western “suit and necktie” and “dresses,” but they should respect and value their own culture more than others. All the beautiful traditional costumes, including man’s silver sword and bag, are to be modernizing in order to fit well for this and coming generations. As a costume is also a part of the Kachin identity, it is also crucial to develop the traditional costume that is free from coloniality. Here, I do not mean the Kachin people have to turn back to their old traditions and practices without any critical analysis which is relevant in the present time. While applying the old ways to fit well with the current times, it is also important not necessarily to be influenced by the American ways of living. For the Kachin people, the terms “civilization, modernization,” “Americanization,” and “Westernization” are different in meaning and, therefore, should not be collapsed into a single concept. When civilization/modernization represents progress in cultural values, it is good and presents an ethical claim upon Christians. It is present as an ethical claim to be called “humanization.” The Kachin Christians, in this situation, are responsible for the

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<sup>27</sup> Leela Gandhi, *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 136.

promotion of the civilization/modernizing process. However, it should be freed from the influence of American/Westernization.

More importantly, the American Baptist missionaries came to the Kachin land with the aim of “civilizing mission” to civilize the Kachin people. The Kachin people were called “uncivilized mountain people” and would be eradicated if they did not convert them to Christianity. That is why the idea of education as a tool of colonization was introduced to the Kachin people. Gandhi mentions that

Recent studies of imperial textuality are also mindful of an alleged complicity between nineteenth-century colonial ideology and the emergence of English literature as an academic discipline in the colonies. These accounts argue that the “English text” effectively replaced the Bible—and thereby, the evangelical ambitions of Christian missionaries—to become the most influential medium for colonial civilizing mission.<sup>28</sup>

This is also true in the Kachin land in Myanmar. The introducing of the missionaries ushered a modern worldview among the Kachin society. It was one of the missionary methods that wherever a church was founded, a school was also established. These schools were known as “missionary schools.” English as a colonial language became more influential and important than the Kachin language. Those who speak English were regarded as those who knew everything. These schools assimilated the Kachin people to a new faith, and also to science, politics, technology, history, and American culture. Through the development of colonial education, the missionary schools helped to promote new social relationship among the Kachins. The Christian impacts of the missionary schools upon the students that many pupils turned to become earnest Christian believers. Kwok also asserts that Westernization and Christianization are similar in process in the name of civilizing mission. She writes:

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 144.

As colonial desire and imperialistic violence were masked and reconstituted in a blatant reversal as “civilizing mission,” the Christian church played important roles through the sending of missionaries, establishing churches and schools, and propagating ideas of cleanliness and hygiene. Christianization and Westernization became almost a synonymous process in the colonial period.<sup>29</sup>

To apply it in the Kachin context, the Kachins came to believe Christianity as the “religion of civilization” and this led them to mass conversion. The Kachin people came to believe that converting into Christianity is the only way of civilization. In this sense, it is worthwhile to say that Christianization and Americanization are two sides of the same coin. It is a pitiful and sad thing that the American missionaries, because of their ignorance and burning zeal to develop a pure faultless Christianity, had cut off the new Kachin converts from all of their cultural heritage by rearing them in isolated mission centers to be “mission compound mentality.” This led the Kachin churches to “isolationism” and made it “other worldly” in theology.<sup>30</sup> Kwok Pui-lan is right when she claims that “theological training in Asia at the time continued the process of colonizing Asian minds, even long after the colonizers had packed up and gone home.”<sup>31</sup>

Similarly, the coloniality is still going on in the minds of the Kachin people even after the missionaries and British colonization were gone. For example, many Kachin pastors do not want to wear the Kachin traditional costumes, such as variegated turban and trousers; instead, they are very proud of wearing “suit and necktie.” Suit and necktie

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<sup>29</sup> Pui-lan, *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology*, 17.

<sup>30</sup> Lahpai Zau Lat, “Religion and Society in Burma” (Paper presented at the Seminar of Stockholm School of Theology (THS), Sociology of Religion Course, Sweden (May 4, 2005), 2. Rev. Dr. Lahpai Zau Lat was the professor emeritus of Old Testament Theology in Myanmar Institute of Theology. He is not only the outstanding Old Testament Scholar in Myanmar, but also one of the very few pioneer theologians among the Kachins. His most valuable contribution to the contextual theology is *Reading the Bible through the Lens of Burmese Eyes*. Most of his writings, including the class lectures, are always concerned with the cultural context of the peoples.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.



became the standard dress for Kachin pastors. The Kachin people have their own beautiful God-given musical instruments and music. Unfortunately, the missionaries taught that all the traditional musical instruments, such as gongs, drums, bamboo flutes, and horns, belonged to Nats and, therefore, should not be used in praising and worshipping God. For instance, the Kachins usually played the gongs (in different sizes) and drums along with the dance during every funeral service. It is called “*Kabung Dum*,” and the funeral dance is called “*Kabung Manau*.” When the missionaries came, both the *Kabung* music and *Kabung* dance were no longer performed during any funeral service. It was totally eliminated from the Kachin religious practices. Only western musical instruments like violins, pianos, and guitars are allowed to play in the church and also in other Christian related celebrations. Regarding these problems, Lahpai Zau Lat, a prominent Myanmar biblical scholar and theologian, critically remarks that:

It is an offensive and shameful thing to sing in our native tune in the church even though all the words in the song are Christian. Only Western hymnals are holy to be used in the worship service as if it were sanctioned by God from the beginning. But it began to uncover that many of the Western hymnals which are using as the “holy tune” in the church are in reality came from secular: e.g., “My Jesus as Thou Wilt” (tune=Jewett)-famous opera music; and “Above the Hills of Time the Cross is Gleaning” (Traditional Irish Melody)-love song “O Danny Boy....” Some churches attempted to use their Christianized native songs in the worship service. But were rebuked by the missionaries and church elders and were finally thrown them out of the church.<sup>32</sup>

Consequently, today many Kachin Christians are not interested in playing their traditional music or the musical instruments. It is very hard to find the experts who can play the traditional bamboo flutes, gongs, and drums. The Kachin folk song, the village bard called “*Laka*,” and the other traditional songs, have gradually disappeared. Rather,

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<sup>32</sup> Zau Lat, “Religion and Society in Burma,” 3-4.

the Western music and songs composed with the Western tune have been rooted, for many decades, in every Kachin church. Moreover, in the former days, all the Kachin traditional dances like “*Htawngka*,” and “*Manau*” were prohibited to dance in the churches because those were regarded as the “Nat Dances” related to the worship of evil spirits. This severely impacts today’s Kachin churches. Most of the Kachin Christians are used to dancing Western dances in such church-related celebrations as Christmas, New Years, birthday parties, and so on. Such a kind of modern Western music—Rock, Rap, Hip Hop, Punk, Alternative, and Western shows like Modeling and Fashion shows and Cat walk shows have rapidly influenced the lives of young people as well as children in today’s Kachin churches. There are more that the American Baptist missionaries opened them up to Western influences and now capitalism has showed them other things from the West.

In order to promote an authentic Kachin Christianity, the Kachins have had to transform their traditional songs and musical instruments. They have to worship God with their own music composed with traditional tunes accompanied by traditional musical instruments such as drums, gongs, flutes, and cymbals. The Kachin traditional music should also be used in the church and church-related services side-by-side. Additionally, there should be a “Kachin Traditional Hymnal” to worship and praise God with the authentic Kachin tunes. The Kachin churches have to promote and modernize their traditional songs and music in order to fit well with the current times. Most Kachin Christians already feel comfortable singing Western hymns in church, which have become an integral part of their expression of faith. The newly composed work with

strong cultural elements, however, may disturb their comfortable habit in singing Western hymns.

Moreover, the weddings of the Kachin Christians are totally westernized. In the pre-Christian days, Kachin people had their own style of a wedding ceremony. Whenever a marriage took place in the house, the bride “*Num Ningnan*” who belonged to another clan and hence another “*Nat*,” must pass through a slippery wooden bridge with tall reeds fenced on both sides. The bride, in order to enter into the bridegroom’s house, must be baptized by passing through the gate to parallel blood-stained wood plants from animal sacrifice, which is about ten feet long. This is also called, in another way, “*Kumba Shalai Ai*,” passing the elephant grass to solemnize a marriage, which is the main ritual part of the ceremony. But, when the Kachin people became Christians, instead of the ritual of passing through the slippery wooden bridge, the missionaries introduced the Western “Wedding March,” like “Here Comes the Bride.”<sup>33</sup> Zau Lat further claims;

The bride though dressed in our native costume, put on a white veil on her head and is allowed to open it only after the marriage vow as if they would kiss in public. In addition to the exchange of traditional silver sword and bag with silver ornament, like the Westerners, the groom also gives a wedding ring as a witness to their vows. When it comes to the wedding feast, a very expensive three-story wedding cake must be on the wedding table in addition to the regular rice and different kinds of dishes on the table. The wedding cake was cut with a ceremony and with the sound of clapping and each guest will get a small piece of the wedding cake and eat it as if the staple food of Asian-rice has changed to cake all of a sudden.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Here Comes the Bride was originally written by Richard Wagner (1813-1883), a German composer, it is a wedding march played for the bride’s entrance at the formal weddings throughout the Western world. See Sheetmusic2Print, “Wagner: Bridal Chorus- Here Comes the Bride,” YouTube Video, 2:38, May 9, 2012, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?list=SRrichard+wagner+here+comes+the+bride&time\\_continue=2&v=a4sNsGePgs8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?list=SRrichard+wagner+here+comes+the+bride&time_continue=2&v=a4sNsGePgs8).

<sup>34</sup> Zau Lat, “Religion and Society in Burma,” 4.

With this regard, the Kachin Christians do not value on their own traditional silver sword and bag with silver ornaments. They came to emphasize the wedding rings. Usually in the Kachin weddings, the pastors pronounce a vow to the marriage couple when both of them gave or exchanged the wedding rings on their fingers. However, there is no vow when the bride presents the traditional silver sword and bag on the shoulder of the bridegroom. The wedding rings became the center of marriage vow, and the silver sword and bag are no longer meaningful except just for the outwardly decoration. Using “rings” in the wedding is not the Kachin culture. It is the tradition of the Westerns. The most invaluable and precious thing, for the Kachins, using in the wedding is the traditional silver sword called “*Nhtu N-ga*.”<sup>35</sup>

In this way, the missionaries imposed upon the Kachin people their American culture directly as well as indirectly. The advent of American Christianity severely affected not only the Kachin people’s perception of the world but also brought a lot of changes to all aspects of life. All the worship services and programs, including the church buildings, are in the form of Western traditions. Practically speaking, the impact of Western culture or the imperialism of Americanization on today’s Kachin churches, created more disadvantages than advantages. Undoubtedly, in such situations, most of the Kachin churches have become the American-oriented churches.

The Kachins are also like some of the fruits found in tropical Asia, described as Banana Christianity instead of Mango Christianity. In his book, *Mangoes or Bananas?* Hwa Yung defines that “the banana is of uncertain origins, whereas the mango is an authentic Asian fruit. Ripe bananas are yellow, but when peeled reveal flesh/off-white in

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<sup>35</sup> Pungga Ja Li, *Jinghpaw a Hkap la Hkan sa Shatup Lam* (What Kachins Believe and Practice) vol. 1 (Ruili: Sinpraw Bum Media Group, 2004), 72.

color. On the other hand, most species of mangos, when ripe, have turned yellow on both the outside and the inside.”<sup>36</sup> Together with the theological statements of Hwa Yung, what today’s Kachin Christianity needs are more theological mangos but not theological bananas. This is also similar to Frantz Fanon’s idea of *Black Skin White Masks*. Fanon “focuses on the problems of identity created for the colonial subject by colonial racism. Black children who were raised within the racist culture of colonial system resolve the tension between contempt for blackness and their own dark skin by coming to think of themselves as white.”<sup>37</sup> Fanon asserts that “the black man possesses two dimensions: one with his fellow blacks, the other is with the whites. A black man behaves differently with a white man than he does with another black man. There is no doubt whatsoever that this fissiparousness is a direct consequence of the colonial undertaking.”<sup>38</sup> This is true for the Kachin Christians. Yet, the fact remains that Kachin Christianity does not have a very clear sense of its own self-identity. The Kachin churches are both religiously and culturally deformed—Kachin outside, but American inside or *Kachin skin White masks*. The advent of American Christianity severely affected not only the Kachin people’s perception of the world, but also brought a lot of changes to all aspects of lives of the entire creation.

Similarly, many missionaries denied the existence of the religion in Kachin indigenous people. They just looked at the Nat worship as a form of superstition but not as a religion. By tracing back the indigenous religions of Southern Africa, David

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<sup>36</sup> Hwa Yung, *Mangoes or Bananas? The Quest for An Authentic Asian Christian Theology* (Oxford: Regnun Books, 1997), 240.

<sup>37</sup> Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2008), ix.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

Chidester attempts to search the discourses and practices of comparison that have constituted “frontier, imperial, and apartheid comparative religion.”<sup>39</sup> Chidester articulates that the European travelers, missionaries, and colonial agents employed the term “religion” in Southern Africa as a crucial marker of difference on contested frontiers. Similar processes of denial, displacement, containment, and control can be found in Kachin indigenous people of Myanmar. I discuss and apply Chidester’s major arguments, particularly the concept of “superstition as a religion” and make it relevant into Kachin Nat worship.

Chidester’s *Savage Systems* localizes approach of categorization, exploration, and appropriation of the indigenous religion within the colonial frontiers of the Hottentots and the Xhosa. Concerning the Hottentots, La Vaillant insists that religion was absent in Hottentots and they were “not only living without religion” but also, they “lacked any form of superstition.” Le Vaillant claims that “Where there is neither religion nor worship and it is impossible there can be superstition.”<sup>40</sup> I totally agree with La Vaillant when he mentions that “superstition is an extension of religion” and is “part of the fabric of religion.”<sup>41</sup>

Looking from the Kachin indigenous people, the Kachin people have religion because they are very much superstitious. Ola Hanson, the American Baptist missionary and the ethnographer, who invented the Kachin literature alphabet from Roman character, produced the Kachin Dictionary, and translated the Bible into the Kachin, also finds that Kachin people have some form of belief, to some religious and superstition. Hanson sees

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<sup>39</sup> David Chidester, *Savage Systems: Colonialism and Comparative Religion in Southern Africa* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1996), 2.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

the religious practice of Kachin people as “spirit worship or demonolatry, shamanism or animism in a form of peculiarly adapted to the habits and intellectual development of a semi-savage mountain people.”<sup>42</sup> He remarks that the Kachin people have a strong faith in the invisible and are extremely superstitious. Taking this into account for the Kachin people, religion and superstition cannot be separated. Here, Chidester is also relevant in Kachin savage religion that “the beliefs and practices of “savages” could be reconfigured as religion.”<sup>43</sup> Regardless of the “European observers who entered southern Africa and declared that the indigenous people had no religion,” Chidester “wanted to investigate that denial as a point of departure for a localized, contextualized history of comparative religion in southern Africa.” He finally discovered that “Africans had a religious system.”<sup>44</sup> Again, to support his concept of religion or religions, Chidester’s classifies:

In this emerging global comparative religion, the term worship provided the genus within which the species of religion could be differentiated. The children of Abraham, whether Christian, Jewish, or Muslim, worshipped God, to better or worse effect. Accordingly, their religions were implicitly classified as religions of “God worship.” Looking to the East, comparativists stereotyped Hindus and Buddhists as pagan idolaters. They were classified as practicing religions of “idol worship.” If Africans had no clear idea of a Supreme Being, as nearly all European reports contended, and had no idols or other visible representations, how could they be classified? As neither God nor idol worshippers, Africans were classified by the acts of respect and veneration they demonstrated for their

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<sup>42</sup> Hanson, *The Kachins: Their Customs and Traditions*, 149-150. Rev. Dr. Ola Hanson (1864-1929) was the greatest American Baptist missionary to the Kachins for 36 years. Hanson first published a grammar of the Kachin language in 1896 and later he published a Kachin-English Dictionary in 1906. With his knowledge of Swedish, English, German, Hebrew, Greek, Kachin, Burmese, and Shan, Hanson translated the Bible into Kachin, which was completed in August 11, 1926. He translated over 400 hymns and also composed 200 hymns for the Kachins. For his literary achievements—the development of a written language, a compilation of the Kachin-English Dictionary, and the translation of the Bible, Hanson was awarded the honorary degree of Doctor of Letters by Colgate University, Hamilton, New York, in June 1909. After 36 years of hard and persistent labor among the Kachin people, Hanson passed away in the Midway Hospital in St. Paul, Minnesota on October 17, 1929 and his earthly remains are in Oakland, Nebraska. The ownership, the executive rights and privileges, of the gravesites and the plot of Ola and Minnie Hanson was officially granted by the Hanson descendants to the First Kachin Baptist Church of America, Omaha, Nebraska, on May 27, 2018.

<sup>43</sup> Chidester, *Savage Systems*, 18.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, xv.

ancestors. In this classification system, Xhosa religion, like other indigenous religions in southern Africa, emerged as a special type of religion, “ancestor worship.”<sup>45</sup>

In this regard, there is no reason to deny the existence of the religion in Kachin indigenous people. The Kachin Nat worship is God worship as well as ancestor worship.

Then they substituted Christian religion in the place of Nat worship for the Kachin people. Chidester remarks that, the denial of Hottentot religion was formulated in more specific terms as an absence of a belief in God. The assertion that “they know nothing God or the Devil added a second aspect of Christian absence to the denial of any religion among the Hottentots.”<sup>46</sup> It is also true in Kachin context that when the first missionary, Eugenio Kincaid, came along with the British colonial regime to Mogaung, Kachin land, in 1837, the Kachins were regarded as “savages” who did not have God or know anything about God. Then Kincaid thought that the Kachin people needed religion. He started the missionary work among the Kachins, and later on many missionaries came to proselytize the Kachin people and gave them religion called “Christianity.”

#### B. Theological Response to the Conversion of Nat Worshippers to Christianity

The missionary Christianity brought with it theological aspects, such as dualism, hierarchy, and patriarchy that have negatively affected the Kachin people’s environment and contributed to their current ecological crisis. The missionaries, particularly American Baptist missionaries, taught the Kachin people to believe that one must be free from Nat worship and culture in order to become a Christian. Turning away from Nat worship to Christianity made Kachin people put aside their high respect of

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 115.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 37.



nature, and it caused the ecological problems along with the theological and cultural impact.

The missionaries regarded the Kachin Nat worship as “paganism or heathenism” and was not recognized as a God-given religion. The terms, Animism and Paganism, have been negatively used by the missionaries to eradicate the indigenous religion of the Kachins. The missionaries made these words “bad,” but they need to be reclaimed. “Animist”<sup>47</sup> means that all things, in nature are alive and filled with spirit. “Pagan”<sup>48</sup> actually means the people who live in the rural areas. Thus, these words are good words to be reclaimed. The Kachin people were taught, in this way, to believe that Nat worship was the religion of Evil/Satan. Hanson comments:

Culturally and religiously, the Kachins are backward. With no written language and with nothing uplifting in their religion they have slid about as low as the human race can go. Their priests are not concerned with their gross ignorance or with the moral life in the village; their main concern is in pleasing, appeasing, and cajoling the Nats, or, evil spirits.<sup>49</sup>

The Kachins, then, gradually came to believe that all their cultural elements belonged to the culture of Evils or life rejecting culture. Finally, all the Kachin cultural elements were

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<sup>47</sup> According to Sarah Anne Lawless, the Latin *animus* means “the rational soul, intelligence, consciousness, and mental powers” and the feminine *anima* means “soul, living being, mind, and breath.” English anthropologist Sir Edward Burnett Taylor popularized the already existing term *animism* from the Latin *anima* combined with the suffix-ism (attached to words associated with practices, beliefs, doctrines, worship, etc). He defined “animism” as the “theory of the universal animation of nature.” For more information about animism, see Sarah Anne Lawless, “Everything You Need to Know About Animism” <http://sarahannelawless.com/2017/04/23/everthing-you-need-to-know-about-animism/> (accessed January 15, 2019).

<sup>48</sup> The Latin word *paganus*, referring to the countryside and what pertains to the rural, agricultural communities, has become English language the pejorative word “pagan.” Mercy Amba Oduyoye defines that paganism in the sense of a belief in a world that is living and therefore dependent on the inbreathing of the divine and the care of humanity may yet pull us back from the brink of disaster. It calls for a shift from an anthropocentric to an interdependent vision of life and being. See Mercy Amba Oduyoye, “Pagan,” in *Dictionaries of Feminist Theologies*, eds. Letty M. Russell and J. Shannon Clarkson (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 198-199.

<sup>49</sup> Gustaf A. Sword, *Light in the Jungle: Life Story of Dr. Ola Hanson of Burma* (Chicago, Illinois: Baptist Conference Press, 1954), 33.

thrown away along with the Nats by the missionaries. The missionaries gave their own American culture as the Christian culture to replace the culture of the Kachin people.

While much good has come of missionary work, a lot of “bad” has as well. Even though the Kachin people have beautiful traditional costumes, they did not know how to wear it properly. Most of the Kachin men and women went about half-naked, and the children usually ran about without any clothing at all. It is not the traditional clothing style; it is just because of a lack of knowledge of clothing styles. It is the grace of the missionaries that the Kachin people came to live with a higher civilization. It is good that the missionaries taught the Kachins how to wear clothes well, but it is bad the Kachins are not taught how to wear their traditional costumes. Certainly, the Kachins have changed their living conditions because of the sacrificial service of the missionaries. However, it is not a good result that the missionaries regarded all the forms of Kachin Nat worship as the bloody demon-worship or the evil religion. Chidester is correct, for the Kachin context, when he asserts that “the colonial mission and government cooperated in the extension of Christian civilization.”<sup>50</sup> Both had to recognize that religion and politics are also intertwined into the system of the Xhosa. “While priest supported chiefs, and chiefs supported an established priesthood, religion and politics were interwoven in one vast system of paganism.”<sup>51</sup>

The coming of the Gospel to the Kachins faced many struggles and difficulties. On the one hand, “social, political, economic and psychological forces were used in opposing the spread of the Christian Gospel.”<sup>52</sup> Kachin religious leaders and commoners

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<sup>50</sup> Chidester, *Savage Systems*, 106.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Tegenfeldt, *A Century of Growth*, 308.

as well as the *Duwa* (chief), “resisted the Christian message because of its threat to their cultural solidarity.”<sup>53</sup> On the other hand, “becoming a Christian was looked upon as not only embracing a foreign religion, but as actually becoming a foreigner, a member of an alien tribe, associated with the white man.”<sup>54</sup>

The missionaries taught Kachin people to believe that the Christian God was the *Karai Kasang*, the Unknown God whom they worshiped. The missionaries taught them to pray, to praise and to worship *Karai Kasang*. Their own belief in Supreme Being, *Karai Kasang* made them believe in the Creator God of the Christian Bible preached by the missionaries. However, introducing this classical Christian concept of God really made Kachin people turn away from their non-dualistic, non-hierarchical, and non-patriarchal *Karai Kasang*. Regarding how the missionaries imposed the Western concept of God into the Kachin context, Nngai Gam, a father of Kachin theology, says:

We, Kachin people are sure that we worship the God of our ancestors rather than the God that was brought to us by the Western missionaries. Of course, the Western God has a son called Jesus Christ. It is very strange to us that God has a spirit and his son Christ also has a spirit as God and Christ themselves are unseen spirits. Spirits have spirits. For Kachin people, God is a spirit, Christ is a spirit; they need not have spirits. The Trinity is nonsense for Kachin people. Of course, we can worship many gods as other religions do; two or three gods are not enough for us.<sup>55</sup>

Nngai Gam is right when he asserts that the Kachin people do not worship the God brought to them by the missionaries. They worship the God found in their own indigenous religion. Nngai Gam provides “a counter-narrative to the dominant

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 317.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 315.

<sup>55</sup> Nngai Gam, “The Kachin Theology,” *Myihtoi Ma Magazine*, 1997, 172. Rev. Nngai Gam served as a Lecturer of Theology in Kachin Theological College, Nawngnang, Myitkyina for 39 years. He worked as the pastor of Jaw Masat Kachin Baptist Church, Nawngnang, Myitkyina till his death on December 20, 2004. He was the pioneer Kachin theologian, who first introduced the Kachin contextual theology, doing theology with Kachin cultural resources since in the early of 1980s. He contributed many invaluable writings and resources for doing Kachin Theology.

missionary discourse that had emerged during decades of conflict, which he believed undermined Kachin cultural experiences and respect for the past.”<sup>56</sup> Mandy Sadan, a Kachin researcher and scholar, suggests that “the act of conversion to Christianity had become by this time not just a social and political repositioning of Kachin ideological constructs, but also a deeper cognitive reordering of beliefs around the notion of history and the Kachin past itself.”<sup>57</sup>

I consider here with some points of connection between Kachin beliefs that made Christianity easier to understand and accept. There are many factors to make the Kachins fully converted into Christianity. It can also be noticed that even though the majority of Kachin people became Christians, the concept of Nat worship is still deeply alive in their hearts. This is because the Kachins accepted the Gospel through the lens of Nat worship. To analyze the growth factors, the question “Why” the Christian Gospel took root and grew at varying rates of growth is to be considered. Theologically responding, the indigenous religion of the Kachins, Nat worship itself had paved the way for the coming of the Christian Gospel. Firstly, through their indigenous concept of *Karai Kasang*, they could warmly understand the Christian God in the Bible regardless of some differences as discussed. The second point is because of the legend of the “Lost Book” or “Book of Parchment.”<sup>58</sup> The Kachins have been living with their own Scripture, the Book of

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<sup>56</sup> Mandy Sadan, *Being and Becoming Kachin: Histories Beyond the State in the Borderworlds of Burma* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 396-397.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 397.

<sup>58</sup> The story of the Lost Book in the Kachin mythodology is like this: “When the world had been set in order and the different races assigned their respective homes, *Ninggawn Wa Magam*, after having built a house on the *Shajang* mountain, and a dancing floor on the *Sumhpan* plain. After having propiated all the fates, called the children of men together and informed them that now he was ready to return to his great central palace. The tribes of men implored him to remain, as without him they would be helpless. This request he could not grant, but he gave to the wild boar his tusks, and to the hornbill its gorgeous plumage. Likewise, for the help of mankind he gave to each race a book. The Chinese received a book on paper; the Shans and Burmans books of palm-leaves, to foreigners he also gave paper books, but the Kachins received

Parchment, which was believed to be written on vellum or parchment made of the fine animal skin called “*Shanhpyi Laika*.”<sup>59</sup> One of the Kachin native pastors composed a song about the story of the Lost Book, which is in the Kachin Worship Hymnal No. 355 “*Jinghpaw Laika*” (The Legend of the Book). A free translation of this song by Gustaf A. Sword is as follows:

Oh ye people of Kachin land,  
Long ago you had a book,  
But the book was made of parchment  
And so the priests ate it up.

Once again we have a book,  
Which cannot be eaten up,  
It is made of paper white,  
Keep it clean with all your might.  
Whoever keeps this book,  
Soon will gain a bright new look,  
Sure foundations he shall find,  
If this book he seeks to mind.

This book learns to love and know,  
Then from fear of Nats you’ll grow,  
You a child of God shall be,  
Come and try, and you shall see.<sup>60</sup>

Observing this song, it can be noted that God gave the Kachins another Book called the Bible on the white paper, should be named “*Maisau Laika*,” written in the Kachin language. The Kachins never called it the Lost Book; rather, they term it the

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a book of parchment. On the return the recipient of the Kachin book prepared and ate it, either to appease his hunger or else cause he thought this the best way to preserve it. But at all events since that day the Kachins have had no written book; the great priests and story-tellers keep its contents in their minds (literally, in their stomachs), and repeat it all at the great feasts, when it takes three days and nights to rehearse it. It contains the only authentic record of creation, the flood, different human races, the origin of the Nats and tells us all about their work and worship. See Hanson, *The Kachins*, 116-117.

<sup>59</sup> For many centuries, the Kachin people have been orally transmitted their Scripture called “*Shanhpyi Laika*” through the *Jaiwa* and *Dumsa* languages (only the spoken language). Pungga Ja Li, a Kachin Oral Traditional Researcher, had researched and translated it in written language with a *Jinghpaw* dialect. Now, many invaluable resources can be available for Kachin theology. Ja Li had produced many books relating to the Kachin Scripture, *Shanhpyi Laika*.

<sup>60</sup> Sword, *Light in the Jungle*, 68-69.

Book of Parchment, namely, “*Shanhpyi Laika*.” Theologically speaking, according to Nngai Gam, the first Book of Parchment “*Shanhpyi Laika*” was not actually lost even though the legend termed it the “Lost Book.” It was transmitted to the *Jaiwa-Dumsa* orally in poetic form.<sup>61</sup> All the Kachin myths, the creation stories, primeval histories, the beginning of Nats and human beings such “Wisdom Stories” are to be found only in the “*Shanhpyi Laika*.” It was recited by the priests in the ceremonies at the sacrifice to a certain Nat. These religious practices were passed down from one generation to the next. This *Shanhpyi Laika*, in this sense, is still living in the heart of the Kachin people today. It is right to say that *Shanhpyi Laika* paved the way to accept the Christian Bible and understand its meaning more effectively. *Shanhpyi Laika* is, therefore, an oral scripture indicating that indigenous Kachin already had a scripture.

Thirdly, through the practices of sacrificing to the Nats, they came to be familiar with the redeeming love of Jesus Christ who died as the sacrificial victim on the Cross for the sake of the people. The fourth major factor for the rapid conversion of the Kachins into Christianity is due to their “multi-individual, mutually interdependent”<sup>62</sup> decision making. From the very beginning, the social structure of the Kachins is, explicitly saying, the community-oriented or communal life. The Kachin social institution is centered on the tribe “*Amyu bawsang*,” the clan “*Amyu lakyang*,” the family or the household

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<sup>61</sup> Nngai Gam, “Theology from a Kachin Story of the Lost Book,” *Myanmar Journal of Theology* vol. 3 (2004): 70.

<sup>62</sup> Multi-individual means that many people participate in the act. Mutually interdependent means that all those taking the decision are intimately known to each other and take the step in view of what the other is going to do. Donal A. McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 302-303. Quoted in Herman G. Tegenfeldt, *A Century of Growth*, 309. This pattern is the way the Kachins are accustomed to deciding almost any matter—arranging a marriage, looking for the jobs; moving to another place. Thus, the Kachins should consult with their respective “*mayu*” and “*dama*” relatives, naturally in any matter as important as a change of religion for a number of them to come to a decision together.

“*Htinggaw*” and the village “*Mare kahtawng*.” Each *htinggaw* belongs to a particular *amyu lakying*, and there is the head of each clan. As a village consisted of different clans and tribes, every village has its own *Duwa*. The *Duwa* is the decision maker in the village. If the *Duwa* decides to embrace the new faith, all the villagers have to follow, without any complaint, leading to mass conversion. Accordingly, the Kachins turned to Christianity not isolated individuals or even single families, but rather several families making their decision together.<sup>63</sup>

Moreover, the Kachins not only live under the leadership of the *Duwa*, the influential elders in the same clan, the heads of the families, but also must follow the decision of the *Jaiwa* and *Dumsa*- the priests, especially in the religious matters. The *Jaiwa* and *Dumsa* have the highest authority and are the most important figure in the spiritual life of the people. They know more about the idea of *Karai Kasang* rather than the ordinary people. They are well acquainted with the knowledge of Nats and the religious practices in Nat worship. “When they heard the Gospel, they are more quickly convinced and are converted more deliberately.”<sup>64</sup> As the *Jaiwa* and *Dumsa* were the

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<sup>63</sup> Bawmung La and wife and their son and daughter-in-law, Nangzing Yung and wife Lazum Kaw Lum, and Gawlu Htang Yawng were the first seven Kachin converts, who were baptized in March 19, 1882, in Bumwa, Bhamaw. This clearly showed that the conversion of the Kachins is not isolated, but communal. On the contrary, the Bamar Christianity was started from the isolated individual conversion. Only after the six years labored of Adoniram Judson, witnessing among the Burma Buddhists, there gained only one convert, Maung Naw, who was baptized alone on June 27, 1819. To understand more about the first Bamar convert, Maung Naw, see Maung Shwe Wa, *Burma Baptist Chronicle, Chronicle* (Rangoon: Burma Baptist Convention, 1963), 17-18.

<sup>64</sup> Lahi Naw La, “The Kachin Traditional Religion and the Gospel” (BD thesis, Myanmar Institute of Theology, 1991), 89-90. Naw La worked on the Kachin oral traditional research and was a lecturer and Dean of Students at the Kachin Theological College, Nawngnang, Myitkyina. Tegenfeldt showed the best example of the great *Dumsa*, Patau Wa from the Shan State. Previously Patau Wa was the most influential *Dumsa* among the twenty-five villages. He became a Christian through his son, who had run away from home to attend a Christian mission school. Along with his family, the other seventeen families burned their Nat altars at the same time. He learned to read and became a deacon and a lay preacher. Through his testimony, a thousand Kachins converted into Christianity. Also see Herman G. Tegenfeldt, *A Century of Growth*, 330-331, Gustaf A. Sword, *Come What May* (Chicago: Conference Press, 1943), 136. The missionaries encouraged the Kachins desiring to turn to Christ to do so by households, and this was accomplished by burning their Nat altars.

most influential and highly respected, they could more impressively persuade the whole community to accept the Gospel and believe in Christ.

Poverty is also another primary source changing the Kachins into the Christian life. When the evil Nats or malevolent Nats often bite people and demand an offering of animals—fowls, cows, pigs, buffaloes, for the sacrifice, the originally poor could not provide enough sacrificial resources. Likewise, whenever the *Manau* dance was performed, it was done by sacrificing several animals, serving enormous guests with rice and meat.<sup>65</sup> All these efforts severely cause the rich Kachins to become poor, and the poor Kachins even poorer. This worsened the aggression of the Nats. They appeased the Nats not just because they fear of them, but also not to give them trouble. The Kachins came to realize that, therefore, they needed freedom from carrying a heavy load of fearing to various Nats and a burden of highly expensive and costly Nat worship. In such situations, their hearts had been longing for the “liberator” who would come and give them a way of liberation. Thus, many Kachins turned their dependence on the Nats to Christ.

The other most important factor is the improvement of education. The introduction of the missionaries ushered a modern worldview among the Kachin society. It was one of the missionary methods that wherever a church was founded, a missionary school was also started. It was in these schools that the Kachin people were assimilated not only to a new faith, but also to science, politics, technology, history and western culture. Sword remarks that:

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 86. From what I have observed, the Kachin Christians have celebrated their ceremonies excessively. Very often, the great *Manau* Festivals were celebrated in every village and were extremely expensive that cost a thousand of million kyats. This is also one of the causes that make the Kachins economically poor.



The Kachins of today are quite different from those the Hansons saw in Bhamo sixty years ago. The Christian religion, education and contact with a higher civilization have greatly changed the Kachins in outward appearances and changed their living conditions. But even today a wild Kachin from the raw jungle, untouched by civilization, makes us wonder if there is any power that can lift him to a higher level.<sup>66</sup>

Through the development of education, the missionary schools helped to promote a new social relationship with the Kachins. The students became earnest Christian believers because of the Christian influence of the Missionary School. Additionally, the Kachins came to believe Christianity to be the “religion of civilization” and this led to mass conversion.

There are many reasonable factors why the Kachins turned to a new religion called “Christianity.” Theologically responding, the primal religion of the Kachins, Nat worship itself had paved the way for the coming of the Christian Gospel. In other words, the Kachin Nat worship can be called the “Forerunner of Christianity.” Through their primal concept of *Karai Kasang*, they could understand the Christian God in the Bible. As the Kachins have their own legend of the Scripture “*Shanhpyi Laika*,” which contains the instructions of the Supreme Being, it is not difficult to accept the Bible as the words of God. Through the practices of sacrificing to the Nats, they became familiar with the redeeming love of Jesus Christ who died as the sacrificial victim on the Cross for the sake of the people. Therefore, in this sense, the primal religion of the Kachin people should be regarded as both Animism and Paganism despite negatively used by the missionaries to eradicate the Nat worship. The Kachin Nat worship should also be called the “unknown Christian religion.” Nat worship created a spirituality that was receptive to Christianity.

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<sup>66</sup> Sword, *Light in the Jungle*, 35. Since Sword wrote this book in 1954, the word “today” used by Sword refers to over fifty-four years ago. Today’s Kachins are also totally different from the time of the days Sword and Hanson saw in Kachin land.

Nat worship, as part of the past, is still part of who the Kachin are, even though it is not an active part of their current becoming. This is because the Kachins accepted the Gospel through the lens of Nat worship.

### C. The Impacts of Polygamy on Kachin Women

There are many positive or life affirming cultural elements in Nat worship that should be maintained and preserved, such as the concept of God, creation narrative, language, costumes, dances, poems, respect of the nature, and so on. But, looking from the perspectives of Christian ethics and women rights, there are also many negative or life rejecting cultural elements that discriminate against women, such as polygamy, polygyny, slavery, use of alcohol and tobacco, patriarchal family structure, bride-price system, free sex custom, and so forth. Here, I discuss the two major practices that relate to polygamous marriage: “*Hpu Ja*” bride-price system and “*Nla Dap*” free sex custom.

#### 1. *Hpu Ja* (Bride-Price)

One of the negative customs that the Kachin Christians inherited from the Nat worship is the bad practice of *Hpu Ja* in marriage. In the Kachin culture, women are regarded as the property of the father and of the family. Kachin marriage is usually arranged by parents, and it is never required to ask the consent of their daughters. The Kachins widely carry out the bride-price system in which the groom’s family has to pay cash and other valuables to the bride’s parents. Usually, the bride-price is requested by the family of the bride, but the final decision is made by the father. There is a meeting before the wedding to decide and judge the price of the relatives and heads of the village (*du salang ni*- all are men) from both sides, “*mayu*” (the family of the bride) and “*dama*”

(the family of the groom). After the marriage, the bride is no longer the property of her father, but is now the property of her husband. She must be totally submissive to her husband. Should her husband die, she is not free. She will then be taken by the brother of her husband or another family relative of her husband. This means that she is the property of the family of her husband forever. The Kachins call this “*Gaida hta ai*” (to marry the wife of a deceased elder brother; a levirate marriage).<sup>67</sup>

Critically speaking, this *Hpu Ja* system strongly ties with the practice of polygamy in Kachin society. Since Kachin marriage totally depends on *Hpu Ja*, Kachin men can marry as many wives as he chooses. There is no law to prohibit it. On the contrary, in the Kachin custom law, women are prohibited from marrying any other than man besides her husband. As a result, many Kachin girls have been sold as wives or concubines and even are being sent to China. Because of the controlling of childbirth in China, there is a shortage of girls, and Kachin men in China are facing difficulty finding wives. Consequently, they attempt to find and “order” Kachin girls from Myanmar—Muse, Munggu, Namkham, Namtau (the cities near the border of China). A great deal of money can be spent to order girls to be sent as prospective wives. We call it “*num sa ai*” (bridal parcel). In Kachin culture it is nothing just “*num jaw sha ai*” (giving away the bride) by officially *Hpu Ja*. But, when we look at from the eyes of human rights, particularly women’s rights, it is one form of *human trafficking*.

Because of the bride-price system, wives, or concubines, are just sexual instruments for men. Men have the right to beat and divorce their wives anytime they

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<sup>67</sup> *Gaida* means a widow and *hta ai* means *to marry or to take*, and also called *gaida gap* or *gaida kakhyin*. Some Kachin Christians are still following this practice. See Ola Hanson, *A Dictionary of the Kachin Language* (Rangoon: Baptist Board of Publications, 1954), 170.

choose and without cause because their wives have been purchased as their property.

Domestic violence, such as beating wives/concubines, is not considered to be an abuse of women's rights nor an injustice. There is no law to protect domestic violence of the wives/concubines.

## 2. *Nla Dap* (Free Sex Custom)

Another major impact of Nat worship on polygamy is practicing free sex custom “*Nla Dap*.” In the Kachin traditional house, there is a room or apartment for the maidens called “*Nla Dap*,” “where the young people can meet or gather, sing their love songs, and spend the night together in the practice of free love”<sup>68</sup> as well as sexual intercourse. A visitor to a Kachin village is struck by the free and easy way of the young unmarried people. Every evening the young people gather at the *Nla Dap*. Hanson remarks, “the evening hours are passed with music and singing till midnight or later when the gathering breaks up, and sleeping places are found wherever convenient. There are no restrictions in regard to relations between young unmarried people. They are allowed to relate as they choose, and the older people do not see this as improper in any way.”<sup>69</sup>

Every boy in the same village or from other villages is always welcomed, and the host girls have to allow themselves to have sex with the guests. According to the Kachin culture of being hosts, it is rude for girls to deny having sex with guests in any manner. Whether she agrees or not, she must sacrifice her body for the night. This is called “*manam dawjau ai*” (generous hospitality). According to Pungga Sinwa Aung, a Kachin oral traditional researcher, *Nla Dap* is also known as “*Num La Dap/Gawk*” (a place/room

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<sup>68</sup> Sword, *Light in the Jungle*, 64.

<sup>69</sup> Hanson, *The Kachins*, 89.

of taking a wife) and the original concept and practice of *Nla Dap* was good. It was a place for social gathering, sharing, and fellowship of young people, but not for having sex. However, *Nla Dap* turned out to be a “brothel” at the time of British colonial administration.<sup>70</sup> Consequently, a lot of unexpected pregnancies, unwanted children, and the spread of sexually transmitted diseases occur. Women and girls are merely the sexual objects for fulfilling the desire of men. This free sex custom led Kachin men to have sex with as many girls as they choose. This has strongly provided the practice of polygamy in Kachin society thus far.

As consequences of the practices of *Hpu Ja* and *Nla Dap* since the time of Nat worship, the Kachin people do not throw away all those customs even though they converted to Christianity. These practices can easily be found in many Kachin villages and in many Kachin churches. In my attempts to find ethical problems arising from polygamous and monogamous families, polygamous families face more “intrafamily conflicts” than those of monogamous families. More broken families are occurring more frequently in today’s Kachin churches in Myanmar.

Many children have never seen or known their fathers. We, pastors and preachers, are facing many difficulties in how to solve the problems of polygamous marriages in the churches. Even we need to be careful not to preach about the wrongness of polygamy in our sermons because there are a lot of men who have more than one wife participating in our worship services. Most of them are wealthy and support the church generously. In this situation, no pastor dares to say: “You are sinners because you have many wives. The

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<sup>70</sup> Pungga Sinwa Awng (Kutkai Kachin Baptist Church), “NLA DAP (NUM LA DAP)” (A Place/Room for Taking a Wife), Facebook, August 20, 2016.  
[https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story\\_fbid=902132756559579&id=670662716373252](https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=902132756559579&id=670662716373252)

church does not want you to come and worship together anymore. We also do not want your financial support.” Spiritually speaking, the church is regarded not as a place of judgment and excommunication, but instead, is a home for those who are sinners. On the one hand, it is very difficult to denounce the polygamous marriages, however, on the other hand, the Christian norm of monogamous marriage has been declining rapidly in our Kachin churches today. The churches do not have a strong enough theological stance for monogamous marriage. According to Musimbi R.A. Kanyoro, this is also true in African churches. She writes:

Both in the Bible and in African cultures, women who do not give birth or who give birth only to girl children are degraded to a degree, and this helps to perpetuate polygamy. The church is often in a dilemma about polygamy because on the one hand it finds support for its position in the scriptures, which seem to advocate monogamy, and yet there is no direct condemnation of polygamy.<sup>71</sup>

The patriarchal polygamy of the Biblical heroes of figures in the Bible especially in the Old Testament, is another major factor. Most of the Kachin Christians accept Abraham as a “father of faith” and many other biblical heroes like Jacob, Esau, King David and King Solomon, and so on. Even such a father of faith and God trusted men of faith and Kings of Israel had more than one wife, with some having a hundred wives and concubines, so why should the ordinary people be excluded from that custom as well? The Kachin Christians came to believe that polygamous marriage is originally the purpose of God. “If God denies polygamy, why did God bless and utilize such husbands of many wives and concubines throughout the history of Christianity?” Today’s Kachin churches do not have a concrete response to this question yet.

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<sup>71</sup> Musimbi R. A. Kanyoro, “Engendered Communal Theology: African Women’s Contribution to Theology in the Twenty-first Century,” in *Hope Abundant: Third World and Indigenous Women’s Theology*, ed., Kwok Pui-lan (New York: Orbis Books, 2010), 30.

In this way, many Kachin girls have become the victims of polygamy. Some concubines are provided a great deal of money, a luxurious car and house. Most men who have many wives are wealthy. Living a life of poverty has led many young, beautiful girls to choose to become concubines of rich men to support their parents and siblings. Polygamy, in this manner, not only dehumanizes Kachin women, but also undermines the morality of Kachin women today. Because of the increase of Burmese and Chinese business companies mostly in the areas of Hpakant jade land and gold mines, many beautiful Kachin women are used as the tools of “sexual entertainment” with many women forced into “concubinage.”<sup>72</sup> As a result, many Kachin women and girls do not concern themselves with values or dignity and some realize that there are many abuses and women do not have a choice.

Similarly in Africa, traditional customs in Kachin culture still promote the belief that women’s bodies and their sexualities are not their own. Once married, women’s bodies belong to their husbands. Women are expected to respond to their husband’s needs and wishes, often without regard for their own. According to Kwok, “African feminist theologians are concerned about cultural practices around rites of passage of women, and issues such as fertility, dowry, widowhood, sexuality, polygamy, and female circumcision.”<sup>73</sup> Except for female circumcision, all the other issues are the same in Kachin context.

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<sup>72</sup> Hpakant is well known for its jade mining and trading. Hpakant is where we see thousands of polygamous marriages. Most Kachin business men have more than two houses: one is in the city like Yangon, Mandalay (the two major cities in Myanmar), and the others are in Hpakant where they conduct their main business. Usually, they have other wives in Hpakant. For more detailed facts about the sex workers and violation of women’s rights in Hpakant Jade land, see All Kachin Students and Youth Union (AKSYU), *Blood Jade: Burmese Gemstone & Beijing Games* (Burma: AKSYU, 2008).

<sup>73</sup> Pui-Lan, *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology*, 160-161.

#### D. Impact on Kachin Women's Ordination

It is obvious that even though the Kachin people converted from Nat worship to Christianity, their way of life, culturally in many aspects, is still the same as it was in the days of Nat worship. Many Kachin Christians still see women the same as they did in the time of Nat worship. Though Christianity teaches about love and equality of justice, many Kachins treat women differently. There are two major causes for denial of women's ordination in today's Kachin churches, one is socio-cultural, and the other is theological. The first one is the pre-Christian hierarchical and patriarchal social structure of Kachin society. The other is the dualistic and patriarchal teachings of the missionaries.

##### 1. The Reality of Kachin Women in the Churches

On October 19, 2008, I preached about women's ordination under the title, "*Num ni hpe sari lu lata mara hpung up dang ya ai gaw Chyum mungga hte n htang shai ai i?*" (Is women's ordination against to the Bible?), to more than 1200 congregants of Yangon Kachin Baptist Church, Yangon, Myanmar. It was the very first time that I have ever preached about women's ordination. During my sermon, one of the most influential leaders of the Kachin Baptist community went out of the chapel. He silently showed that he was totally against women's ordination. He told the congregants that women's ordination would be possible only after he dies. There were a lot of complaints after my sermon. A lot of conflicts arose in the church. It took several months to calm this women's ordination issue not only in my church, but also in all the churches of the Kachin Baptist Convention. Unexpectedly, many women also did not accept that women ministers should be ordained. Since then, I have been struggling with many critics



regarding women's ordination issues. What are the reasons that the Kachin Baptist Convention denies women's ordination? Does the Bible support women's ordination? What is the meaning of ordination? Why can women themselves not accept women-ordained ministers? Is a denial of women's ordination a part of discrimination against women's rights? Such questions caused me to think deeply about the ordination of women ministers in my own Kachin Baptist churches.

Today, many Christian churches and Baptist Conventions in Myanmar are ordaining women. There are many ordained women pastors in the Myanmar Baptist Convention, but unfortunately, the Kachin Baptist Convention does not allow women's ordination. The Kachin Baptist Convention, one of the biggest Baptist organizations in Myanmar, consists of more than 400 churches and 380,000 believers; and among 2251 ministers,<sup>74</sup> more than half are women. The leaders (mostly men) of the Kachin Baptist Convention still reject women's ordination. In the Kachin Baptist tradition, there are two different kinds of ministers, non-ordained ministers and ordained ministers. Non-ordained ministers are allowed to preach and teach, but they are not eligible to conduct Baptism, Communion, Funeral, Wedding, Child Dedication, and other important religious services. They are not allowed to pronounce benediction in any worship services. They are merely assistants to ordained ministers. Whereas non-ordained male ministers are eligible to have ordination after at least 7 years of ministerial services in the church,<sup>75</sup> women ministers are not eligible for ordination. Only ordained male ministers can become senior pastors. Thus, women ministers cannot become senior pastors.

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<sup>74</sup> Kachin Baptist Convention, "63 Lang na KBC Masat Laban Program" (The 63rd KBC Sunday Bulletin) (KBC: 2018).

<sup>75</sup> KBC Ministers Committee, *KBC Hpung Woi Matsun Laika* (KBC Minister's Manual) (Myitkyina, Kachin state: Hanson Press, 2006), 33.

In Kachin society, it has been taught that women should not be in front of the public, but always to the back. It is also taught that women ministers do not take leading roles in the important ceremonies. For example, during ceremonies like weddings, funerals, and thanksgiving services, only male ministers can lead such services. Though there are many Kachin women ministers who are talented and well-trained with higher theological education, they do not have a chance to take leading roles in the churches and religious organizations. Similarly, though Kachin women received higher education, Kachin men think that women should not lead in politics, economics, or social affairs. The roles of Kachin women in leadership are, in this way, very limited and controlled by men. The voices of the Kachin women are silent about ordination because of the impact of both socio-cultural and theological causes.

## 2. The Socio-Cultural Impact on Kachin Women's Ordination

The social structure of Kachin society was very hierarchical. According to Leach, there are three classes—*Du Magam* (the upper class), *Darat Daroi* (the middle class), and *Mayam* (the lower class or slaves).<sup>76</sup> Zau Nan asserts that “the social estrangement and demarcation among these three classes were very strong. The *Du Magam* class was at the top of social structure and they considered themselves as the masters and controllers of Kachin society.”<sup>77</sup> It was unusual for the *Du Magam* class to marry someone from the *Darat Daroi* class. The *Mayam* class was the slavery class and served the *Du Magam* class. The *Darat Daroi* and *Mayam* classes were excluded from the *Du Magam* class.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Leach, *Political Systems of Highland Burma*, 162.

<sup>77</sup> Zau Nan, “Exploring Feminist Issues in the Kachin Churches,” 187.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

Moreover, the Kachin society includes two major different forms of socio-political systems: *Gumlao* (democratic) and *Gumsa* (aristocratic).<sup>79</sup> The *Du Magam* class was belonged the *Gumsa*, a hereditary aristocracy. The *Gumlau* included neither the *Darat Daroi* class nor the *Du Magam* class because they were independent. The *Gumsa* regard *Gumlau* “as commoner serfs who had revolted against their lawful masters.”<sup>80</sup> Basically, the members of this *Gumlau* class did not want to be chiefs of others and also did not want to be subjects of any chiefs. The *Gumlau* class wanted to build an autonomous society, where everyone has equal rights and value of life.”<sup>81</sup>

Zau Nan further claims that “though the social structure systems of these classes do not exist today, spirit of the hierarchical system is still predominant in the social life of the Kachins.”<sup>82</sup> The Kachin social structure was not only hierarchical but also patriarchal. For example, in a family, the father is the most powerful; after him, the eldest son, not the mother. It is a top down social system. Women are regarded as the same level with children because women are considered weak and soft. Women, in this sense, are indoctrinated to feel as second-class citizens in society, and as a result, an inferiority complex is transmitted among women from generation to generation. Anna May Say Pa, a prominent Myanmar Feminist theologian and a founder of Myanmar Feminist theologies, expresses the reality of Myanmar women with Burmese sayings:

A woman and a gong,  
The more you beat them, the sweeter they sound.  
A woman and an ox,  
The more you beat them, the harder they work.  
You can change a fence when it becomes weathered  
You can change a wife when she becomes old.

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<sup>79</sup> Leach, *Political Systems of Highland Burma*, 57.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 198.

<sup>81</sup> Zau Nan, “Exploring Feminist Issues in the Kachin Churches,” 187.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

Women's wiles are numerous,  
More numerous than the sands of the sea.<sup>83</sup>

All these portray that Kachin women are also treated at the same level as animals and or objects. Sayings, proverbs, stories, and myths are told to teach, guide, and to moralize people in Kachin context. Some of these proverbs, sayings, songs, stories, and myths insidiously inculcate in Kachin women and girl the sense of inferiority, powerlessness, and low self-esteem.

Based on these backgrounds of hierarchical and patriarchal social structure of Kachin society, I discuss some important factors why Kachin women are being rejected for ordination in the churches. Firstly, women are considered to be weak, soft, and less important than men in decision making and other important issues. This cultural concept has resulted in an understanding that the value of men and women are different; men being of greater value than women. This concept has led many Kachins to ignore women in every important matter of family and society. Women are expected to always be silent, passive, and submissive. Since they are marginalized, they become voiceless. In living their lives in this manner from generation to generation, women understand the state of being marginalized as cultural. Many women are happy to be voiceless, marginalized, passive, and submissive in family and society because they are unaware of other options. The equal rights and value of husband and wife are, in this sense, denied in many families, as well as leadership roles of women in the churches.

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<sup>83</sup> Anna May Say Pa, "Birthing an Asian Feminist Theology in the Face of the Dragon: A Burmese Perspective," *RAYS: MIT Journal of Theology* vol. 3 (2002): 27. Dr. Anna May Say Pa served as the President of Myanmar Institute of Theology for 8 years (1998-2006). She is well-known for not only as a scholar of Old Testament Theology but also as a prophetess who denounces gender discrimination in the churches and in the society.

Secondly, the Kachin culture sees women as incapable. The Kachins have a proverb that says: “*U yi goi yang ninghtoi n htoi.*” *U yi* means hen, *goi* means crow and *ninghtoi htoi* means “day breaking” in the morning. The meaning of this proverb is “a day never breaks when a hen or female bird crows.” The opposite meaning of this proverb is “*U la goi yang ninghtoi htoi,*” a day breaks only when a rooster or male bird crows. The connotative meaning of “*U yi goi yang ninghtoi n htoi*” is therefore a denial of women’s power. This teaching has resulted first, in the spirit of dependency, and second, in the inferiority complex many women feel.

Thirdly, women are considered unclean. Women’s monthly blood is seen as impure and polluted. Thus, Kachin men are afraid of touching *labu* (women’s skirt) because Kachin men think that women’s *labu* might pollute them and reduce their power by making men unlucky. The Kachins call it *hpung yuk ai* (disgraceful or polluted). Women’s *labu* should not be placed or dried in common places that can be accessed by anyone. Women’s clothes and men’s clothes are never placed or dried together. Fourthly, there is a chair or place where only the husband can sit in the family. The Kachins call it *Nhtung* (the place of the house owner). That place is often considered a holy place. Therefore, women are forbidden to sit there. It is believed that sitting there by women pollutes the value of the husband or diminishes the husband. All these socio-cultural biases have led Kachin churches to deny women’s ordination.

### 3. Theological Impact on Kachin Women’s Ordination

Another contribution that causes women’s ordination in today’s Kachin Baptist churches is the patriarchal teachings of the missionaries. Baptist contacts with the

Kachins started with the American missionary Eugenio Kincaid, who arrived in Myanmar in 1830 and left for America the last time in 1865.<sup>84</sup> All the missionaries were males and were very conservative. They never talked about women's leadership roles in the churches. Worst of all, the original patriarchal, hierarchical Kachin way of life was empowered by the male-bias literalized texts of the Christian Bible belonging to the missionaries. The American missionaries came and taught that God was *the Father* and Jesus Christ was *the Son*. All three persons of the Trinity are males, and, therefore, the priesthood of men represents the maleness of God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit. As a consequence of the combination of Western patriarchal teachings and indigenous superstitious views of women, only men become decision makers, the power holders, the heads of the family, the pastors of the church, and the leaders of the community that represents God "Himself." Women ministers are regarded as the secondary listeners, helpers, followers, and assistants for the male ministers. In this sense, to be human is to be a male and then to be born as a male is the most valuable trait of all. This created a very problematic impact, and the possibility for women's ordination was lost.

The missionaries brought the gospel along with the Western patriarchal philosophy. For example, their teachings were influenced by the philosophy of Aristotle and many theologians, like St. Augustine and Thomas Aquinas. The philosophy of Aristotle on women had a strong influence on the missionaries' concept of women being

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<sup>84</sup> However, it was four decades before any actual work was undertaken among the Kachins. Brief visits to Bhamaw by the missionaries—A. Taylor Rose, Francis Manson, and Josiah N. Cushing—who were challenged with the opportunity for beginning the mission among the Kachins. It was not until the arrival of Josiah N. Cushing in December 1876 in Bhamaw that the actual efforts to bring the Gospel to the Kachins commenced. The first missionary couple assigned from America for working among the Kachins was Albert J. Lyon who arrived in Bhamaw on February 13, 1878. Tragically, within a month after his arrival at Bhamaw, Lyon passed away from a fever. Only the Kachin Baptist Mission to 1914 was woven around the lives of three dedicated and strong-minded pioneer missionaries—William Henry Roberts, Ola Hanson, and George J. Geis. See Tegenfeldt, *A Century of Growth*, 77.

naturally inferior to men. Summarizing the ideas of Aristotle, Gary Macy says, “men are rational; women are emotional, men are cold; women are hot, men are active; women are passive...the corruption of government exists when government falls to women...women were misbegotten or deformed males...defective male, that is, imperfect.”<sup>85</sup> This teaching, by using Scripture, became a mainstay in both theological and canonical writing. It was influenced by the interpretations of St. Augustine and Thomas Aquinas in many biblical verses. This has shaped the mind-set of the missionaries to misinterpret the Apostle Paul’s teachings on women’s leadership roles to assume that women should not be ordained in the Kachin Baptist churches. For example, I Corinthians 10:7, “A man ought not to cover his head, because he is the image and glory of God, for that reason a woman covers her head because she is not the glory or the image of God.”<sup>86</sup>

Also in I Timothy 2:12-14: “A woman truly does not have the constancy for preaching and teaching and is easily seduced from the truth...I do not permit a woman to teach...Adam was not seduced, a woman was, into a lie.”<sup>87</sup> These passages were, for the missionaries, more important than the other passages, in which women were not only included in the leadership roles but also women were qualified to be priests. For example, Galatians 3:28: “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus” (NRSV). Also in I Peter 2:5-9: “...like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ...you

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<sup>85</sup> Gary Macy, *The Hidden History of Women’s Ordination: Female Clergy in the Medieval West* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 119-120.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 121.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 123.

are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of Him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light" (NRSV).

Critically speaking, the Kachin people abandoned certain beliefs and practices that were detrimental to them, but they also did not embrace Christianity in full. For instance, they retained some superstitious views of women. In this regard, even though Christianity benefited Kachin women in many ways, for example, by no longer participating in the practice of free sex custom, *Nla Dap*, polygamy, arranged and levirate marriage, it also introduced a new problem of a rigid patriarchal system. Additionally, the negative aspects or some superstitious views of Kachin culture on women also affected Kachin women. Thus, this combination of Kachin Christians experience both through the Christianity they inherited, and their prior cultural practices has caused Kachin women to become double victims of exploitation.



## CHAPTER TWO

### THE EXPLOITATION OF NATURE AND WOMEN IN KACHIN LAND

The Kachin people of Myanmar reside in the Kachin state and northern Shan state. However, a majority of Kachin people live in their own Kachin land in the northern part of Myanmar. Before British rule, the Kachin land was a separate country. But then it became a part of Myanmar (then Burma) after their regime.<sup>88</sup> Globalization is also an outgrowth of colonialism because colonialism—political, cultural, religious, and economic—is one of the root causes of the problems. The Kachin land was very beautiful because of its “greenness” and famous for the richness and abundance of its mineral resources. That is no longer true because of the exploitation of nature due to deforestation and mineral harvesting. This exploitation of nature has caused an ecological crisis. Additionally, it has impacted Kachin women because they became victims of poverty and sex trafficking.

#### A. Present Ecological Crisis

The total area of the Kachin land measures about 33,903 square miles, located between 23° -3 to 28° -29 N latitude and 96° -99 E longitudes. The Kachin land shares a border with the Peoples Republic of China to the East, the Democratic Republic of India

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<sup>88</sup> The Panglong Agreement was reached between the Burmese government under General Aung San and the Shan, Kachin, and Chin peoples on 12 February 1947. The agreement accepted “full autonomy in internal administration for the frontier areas” in principle and envisioned the creation of a Kachin state by the Constituent Assembly. For more information about Kachin, see Htoi Gintawng.over-blog.com. “Kachin Historical Background,” <https://web.archive.org/web/20180928040048/http://htoigintawng.over-blog.com/article-the-kachin-historical-background-50860874.html> (accessed September 26, 2018).

to the west, Tibet to the north and Myanmar to the South. About 50% of the total area of the Kachin land is hills and mountains up to the height of 5881 meters above the sea level.<sup>89</sup>

Kachin state's forests form part of an area said to be "very possibly the most diverse, rich, temperate area on earth," however, also suffer from the highest rate of deforestation in Myanmar.<sup>90</sup> Research by Global Witness along the Chinese border indicates that "the volume of timber, both softwoods and hardwoods exported from the Kachin state to Yunnan is no less than 500,000 m<sup>3</sup> (cubic meters) each year."<sup>91</sup> According to Interactive Forest Maps, the annual gross forest loss in hectares in 1989-1996 is 48529, 1989-1993 is 44,143, and 1993-1996 is 52,914. Because of the rate of gross forest loss is both higher and increasing each year, "the abundance of regrowth and the spatial pattern of forest clearing, suggest that deforestation is primarily the result of exploitative logging and shifting cultivation, not permanent agriculture or plantations."<sup>92</sup> According to the Kachin News Group, "about 80 percent of natural forest cover in the Kachin state has been lost due to heavy logging. The extreme cold and hot temperatures in the Kachin state reveals the weather is changing rapidly."<sup>93</sup> The Global Witness reports, "in 1999-2000, Burma's official recorded timber exports totaled 806,000 m<sup>3</sup>, whilst during the same period importing countries recorded approximately 1.72 million m<sup>3</sup>, which suggests illegal exports of 914,000 m<sup>3</sup>. Logging has led to environmental destruction, particularly

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Global Witness, *A Conflicts of Interest: The Uncertain Future of Burma's Forests* (London: Global Witness, 2003), 97.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Jake Brunner, Kirk Talbot and Chantal Elkin, *Logging Burma's Frontier Forests: Resources and the Regime* (World Resources Institute, 1998), 21-24.

<sup>93</sup> Kachin News Group, "Christians in Northern Burma Plant Saplings on Environment Day, June 5, 2008." <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/greenburma/message/1320> (accessed September 26, 2018).

in the Kachin state, where Chinese logging companies have clear-cut vast swathes of virgin forest.”<sup>94</sup>

Tropical deciduous forests and evergreen forests grow in the Kachin state, producing teak and other valuable woods. Famous and rare Myanmar orchids are also found only in the Kachin state. Natural resources of the Kachin state include gold, silver, copper, iron, lead, amber, jade, crystal and coal; in particular, the gold mines, and Hpakant jade mines are well-known. In brief, our Kachin land is “rich in natural resources, including timber, minerals, and gems. It is only one of two places in the world where imperial jade or jadeite is found.”<sup>95</sup> Together with the mineral harvesting, deforestation has occurred in many areas of the Kachin state.

Deforestation has destroyed the lands, and all varieties of trees have been cut down for the benefit of private communities and companies. Many big companies have entered into the Kachin land and occupied all the rivers and streams that have long provided gold, fish, drinking water, a pleasant climate, and healthy soil for the farming. Furthermore, a longstanding strategy of development based on economic growth, liberalization of trade and finance, and global production has led to a “litany of social and ecological crises.”<sup>96</sup> This has resulted in severe poverty and powerlessness of the majority of the people in today’s Kachin churches and caused the destruction of community, depletion of natural resources and many kinds of pollution, i.e., air pollution, water pollution, and soil pollution.

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<sup>94</sup> Global Witness, *A Conflict Interest*, 9.

<sup>95</sup> Kachin Development Networking Group, *Valley of Darkness: Gold Mining and Militarization in Burma’s Hugawng Valley* (Burma: KDNG, 2007), 2.

<sup>96</sup> Pracha Hutauwatr, “Globalization: A Buddhist Perspective,” *WAYS: MIT Journal of Theology* vol. 3 (2002): 126.

Deforestation is of particular concern in Kachin state because of its high level of biodiversity. Teak and other highly valuable hardwoods, such as ironwood and rosewood in the Kachin state, have all but been wiped out through selective logging for this desired expensive species. As a result, many areas in Kachin state have become deforested. The field research shows that in 2010 there are no bigger and valuable trees left. Currently, 11 big companies purchased 393,292 acres for commercial farming.<sup>97</sup> Habitats and wildlife in the Kachin state is in critical situation and endangered. Until the 1950s, it was a carefully managed home for a variety of wildlife, including tigers, antelope, deer, bear, fowl, birds, monkeys, Himalayan fauna, takin, musk deer, red panda, and wolves as well as rhinoceros and up to 800 elephants. But now the majority of them have disappeared along with the forest cover.<sup>98</sup> Big environmental changes include the loss of food, not enough clean water, a water shortage for farming, scarcity of firewood, and trees and bamboos for use in house construction.<sup>99</sup> This has resulted in severe poverty and powerlessness of the majority of the people in today's Kachin churches and caused the destruction of community, depletion of natural resources and many kinds of pollution, such as air pollution, water pollution, and soil pollution. In addition, the presence of many migrant workers has led to an increase in prostitution, HIV/AIDS, drug abuse, and gambling.

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<sup>97</sup> The Burma Environment Working Group (BEWG), *Burma's Environment: People, Problems, Policies* (Chiang Mai, Thailand: BEWG, 2011), 72.

<sup>98</sup> Jake Brunner, Kirk Talbot and Chantal Elkin, *Logging Burma's Frontier Forests: Resources and the Regime*, 21.

<sup>99</sup> Pan Kachin Development Society and Karen Environmental and Social Action Network. *Destruction and Degradation of the Burma's Frontier Forest: Listening to the People's Voices* (Amsterdam: PKDS & KESAN, 2004), 14.

Chinese companies like Jinxin Company, Huaxin Company, and Wun Chung Company,<sup>100</sup> Hongxin Company, F.N.D. Woods Company, Hongan Timber Company, Songij Timber Company, and many others have entered into Kachin land.<sup>101</sup> EarthRights International reports that “a number of companies have been granted mining concessions since 2002. The six most prevalent companies include the Northern Star Trading Company, Seasun Star, the Buga Company, the Wa Company, the Kyatkhaing Yae Company, and the Thwe Company. Of these, Northern Star Trading Company operates the largest number of sites across Kachin state.”<sup>102</sup> These big companies have controlled all rivers and streams, which have previously provided gold, fish, drinking water, a pleasant climate, and good soil for the people.<sup>103</sup>

The current state of Myanmar, where the Kachin people reside, is in a very difficult predicament. Mongobay News, a San Francisco-based news site that highlights issues in environmental and wildlife issues, introduces a picture of the current problems at hand:

Truckloads of illegal timber cross the Burma border to sawmills in China, while markets along the Thai border openly sell bear paws, tiger skins and elephant tusks. Further inland, the repressive military regime plans to dam one of Asia's purest rivers and allows gold and gem mines to tear up hillsides and pollute groundwater for quick cash.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Global Witness, *A Choice for China: Ending the Destruction of Burma's Northern Frontier Forests* (London: Global Witness, 2005).

<sup>101</sup> Global Witness, *A Disharmonious Trade: China and the Continued Destruction of Burma's Frontier Forests* (London: Global Witness, 2006).

<sup>102</sup> EarthRights International, “Mining, Gender, and the Environment in Burma,” <https://web.archive.org/web/20180928035501/https://earthrights.org/publication/mining-gender-and-the-environment-in-burma/> (accessed September 18, 2018).

<sup>103</sup> In *Malihka*, the longest, the most important and the most useful river in Myanmar, in Burmese called “Irrawaddy,” many companies work with big gold finding machines without stopping day and night. Now, all of the gold deposits are gone away and there is no more fish in the river of *Malihka*. Today, half of the *Malihka* River became a “sand ground.”

<sup>104</sup> Michael Casey, “Environmental Problems Loom in Myanmar” [https://web.archive.org/web/20180928040540/http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/10/14/AR2007101400600\\_pf.html?noredirect=on](https://web.archive.org/web/20180928040540/http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/10/14/AR2007101400600_pf.html?noredirect=on) (accessed September 26, 2018).

The mining of Myanmar's rich mineral resources, such as "tungsten, tin, zinc, silver, copper, lead, coal, goal, and industrial minerals," as well as jade resources have several consequences. They have:

forced uncompensated relocation of ethnic communities and the forced sale of land... The vast majority of toxic wastes from gold extraction processes is disposed of untreated directly onto land and into waterways, effectively poisoning the soil and compromising water quality. Mercury and other toxics are biomagnifying in food chains and accumulating in the tissues of living organisms, with negative effects on flora and fauna, local biodiversity, and human health.<sup>105</sup>

A pressing question arises. How has there been such a change from a place where the Kachin people have respected the land, using only what is necessary for survival, to a place where industrialization and globalization rules the land? A better question would be: How has their worldview evolved from one of revering the land to one of raping the land? There is a correlation with the change in their religious faith. The change of faith undermines supporting the natural world and its connection to the degradation of women.

Critically speaking, the Christian religion itself is one of the root causes of the ecological crisis. Many Kachin Christians think of environment as only for their own business and development. This can be clearly seen that when Nngai Gam criticizes:

Nats are spiritual and living laws that help humankind to become righteous and honest. There is no place that is not watched by Nats; the heaven, mountains, forests, rivers, river-lets, hills, and valleys are all watched by Nats. Only when Christians exorcised these Nats from the deep forests of our land, the greedy capitalists destroyed our forests and exterminated our wildlife therein. It is not wrong to say that the Christians are responsible for deforestation because they disenchanted forests.<sup>106</sup>

More precisely, Christian disenchantment along with the greedy anthropocentrism

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<sup>105</sup> The Burma Environment Working Group (BEWG), *Burma's Environment*, 65.

<sup>106</sup> Nngai Gam, "Theology from a Kachin Story of the Lost Book," 72.

collaborated to create the current ecological crisis in the Kachin land. It is undeniable that the people in the time of Nat worship thought highly of nature and did not spoil the forests. Ruether responds, in her critiques of the Western religious responses to the environmental crisis, “a romantic neoanimism, which sought to return to our primitive religious roots when humans were in harmony with nature, and a stewardship conservationism, which sought to conserve natural resources and be good stewards of the environment.”<sup>107</sup> For Ruether, both approaches were inadequate because “there was little recognition that the environmental crisis took place within a particular economic system. The destruction of the natural environment and the social and economic exploitation of people in society are part and parcel of the same reality.”<sup>108</sup>

In Ralph Metzner’s analysis of religious colonization in “The Emerging Ecological Worldview,” he asserts that in monotheistic religions, “God (always masculine) is a transcendent creator-and-law-giver deity, and there is an inseparable gulf between this God and humans, whose only recourse is to obey the law and support the priesthood or church.”<sup>109</sup> Metzner is correct in his analysis of the monotheistic God when compared to animistic religions, such as that of the Kachin people. He continues with the religion of primordial peoples, to which I add the Kachin people and their Nat religion, that everything in nature is connected to

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<sup>107</sup> Rosemary Radford Ruether, “The Biblical Vision of the Ecological Crisis,” *Christian Century* 95, 38 (November 22, 1978): 1130.

<sup>108</sup> Ronald A. Simkins, “Religion, Environment, and Economy: Living in a Limited World,” *Journal of Religion & Society* Supplement 16 (2018): 169.

<sup>109</sup> Ralph Metzner, “The Emerging Ecological Worldview,” in *Worldviews and Ecology: Religion, Philosophy, and the Environment*, eds. Mary Evelyn Tucker and John A. Grim, (New York: Orbis Books, 1994), 167.

spirits, and are living and intelligent beings.<sup>110</sup> By making *Karai Kasang* the only God and the Nats as evil spirits, the next logical step is that nature is evil and needs to be controlled. As Metzner states, “By destroying pagan animism and the shamanic traditions preserved in witchcraft, Christianity drastically severed itself from the roots of a regenerative spirituality grounded in the natural world.”<sup>111</sup> The introduction of a monotheistic God through the Christian religion, as well as the turn from Nats as the spiritual law to Nats as evil spirits, made possible the exploitation of the material world. According to Metzner, “in the modern atheistic, materialist worldview, there is no spiritual being anywhere, either in this life or after death, either in nature or above it-but control, use and exploitation are still the norm.”<sup>112</sup>

Likewise, Mark I. Wallace in “Sacred-Land Theology: Green Spirit, Deconstruction, and the Question of Idolatry in Contemporary Earthen Christianity” states, “in the history of the church, the earth was considered fallen and depraved because of Adam’s original sin in the Garden of Eden.”<sup>113</sup> There was no room for the Nats in the world of Christianity. In the mind of the missionaries, Nats were evil demons, spirits, and should be removed rather than appeased. Once the missionaries removed the Nats from the land, the land became barren, and could be exploited for other uses. The land, in the past protected by the Nats, now became an object for

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 168.

<sup>113</sup> Mark I. Wallace, “Sacred-Land Theology: Green Spirit, Deconstruction, and the Question of Idolatry in Contemporary Earthen Christianity,” in *Ecospirit: Religions and Philosophies for the Earth*, eds. Laurel Kearns and Catherine Keller, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007), 291.



use, as opposed to a land that is regenerative and revered.<sup>114</sup> In fact, the Kachin people's experience on ecological crises raises the question of "ecojustice"<sup>115</sup> as an overriding concern. The life of the poor and the marginalized is, in most of the areas of the Kachin state, impoverished by the ecological crises. The Kachin people are thus made "ecological prisoners" in their own land.

Consequently, the effects have changed the landscape of Kachin civilization. Dams are being built to create hydropowered plants as well as redirecting water from rivers to work the ground for its gold and mineral deposits.<sup>116</sup> Additionally, work on a pipeline to transfer Myanmar's rich oil and gas resources opens up issues of workers' rights and puts into jeopardy the lives of farmers and fishermen who will be displaced because of this massive project.<sup>117</sup> Currently, the seven mega-hydroelectric dam construction projects are under implementation stages in the Kachin state. The impact of large dam projects on people's livelihood, health and social systems has become a serious issue to discuss for Kachin people due to the increased number of internally displaced persons affected by those dam projects. Dam construction, displacement, and the resettlement process impact the entire household. For example, due to the current *Myitsone* dam construction, more than 15,000 Kachin people from 47 villages were

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 292.

<sup>115</sup> Ecojustice is a perspective that combines concerns of ecology and justice, focusing on the use and care of the limited resources of earth in ways that are just and beneficial for the human community. See Donald K. McKim, *Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 86.

<sup>116</sup> The Burma Environment Working Group (BEWG), *Burma's Environment*, 53-57.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 60.

forced to leave their homes, farms, and properties.<sup>118</sup>

## B. Impacts of Globalization

At the end of the 20th century, globalization became an all-purpose catchword in public discourse and momentous changes of globalization took place in economic, political and cultural realms of life. This severely affected the total humanity—the thought forms of the Kachin people and value system of lifestyle. According to James Petras and Henry Vetmeyer, globalization is both a description and prescription. As a description, “globalization refers to the widening and deepening of the international flows of trade, capital, technology and information within a single integrated global market.”<sup>119</sup> As a prescription, “it involves the liberalization of national and global markets in the belief that free flows of trades, capital and information will produce the best outcome for growth and human welfare.”<sup>120</sup>

For Tissa Balasuriya, globalization can be defined as “the trans-nationalization of capital and the standardization and homogenization of consumer

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<sup>118</sup> *Myitson* means “confluence” in Burmese and it is located at the confluence of *Mali Hka* and *Nmai Hka* that came to be known as the Irrawaddy (also known as Ayeyarwady) River. *Hka* means “river” in Kachin. The Irrawaddy River is the longest and the biggest rivers of Myanmar. The people of Myanmar depend on the Irrawaddy River for their livelihood. It is one of the most significant cultural sites and historical heritages for Kachin people, and it is also an important landmark and tourism site for Myanmar. It was started by the agreement between the China Power Investment Corporation (CPI) of China and the Department of Hydroelectric Power Implementation of Myanmar on June 21, 2009. The dam annual production would be 16,634 Gwh and the poser will be worth an estimated US \$500 million per year, most of which will be transmitted to China. See “Kachin Development Report (KDNG),” 2009 and *Myanmar Times* vol. 19, 2007. Right now, because of the protest of the Kachin people as well as the whole country, the present government has stopped the ongoing construction of Myitson dam project for a while.

<sup>119</sup> James Petras and Henry Vetmeyer, *Globalization Unmasked* (Canada: Fernwood Publishing, 2001), 11.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*

tastes.” It is, in other words, called “capitalistic or economic globalization.”<sup>121</sup> The super-power holders behind the process and policies of globalization are the affluent nations (especially the United States of America) and powerful financial institutions, such as the World Bank (WB), International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Trade Organization (WTO). Balasuriya clarifies that “trade liberalization, foreign investments, privatization of public sector enterprises, and promotion of exported crops and industries are the main policies. All these policies are intended for rapid industrialization, a transfer of technology and the availability of credit and foreign aid in the forms of loans, grants or investments that enable debt repayment.”<sup>122</sup> Critically analyzing globalization through the eyes of the Kachin people, “the processes of globalization—technological, economic, political, socio-cultural, and religious are all linked together.”<sup>123</sup> Thus, Globalization, for the Kachin people, has its growing process—first in information, second in finance, third in commerce, and fourth in trade and fifth in administration and bureaucratic organizations.<sup>124</sup> In his book, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*, Thomas L. Friedman describes that globalization creates “both clashes of civilization and the homogenization of civilizations, both environmental disasters and amazing environmental rescues, both the triumph of liberal, free-market capitalism and a backlash against it, both the

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<sup>121</sup> Tissa Balasuriya, “Globalization,” *Dictionary of Third World Theologies*, ed. Virginia Febella (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2000), 91.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Tissa Balasuriya, *Globalization and Human Solidarity* (Kerala, India: Christiava Sahitya Samithy, 2000), <http://media.sabda.org/alkitab-2/ReligionOnline.org%20Books/Balasuriya%2C%20Tissa%20%20Globalization%20and%20Human%20Solidarity.pdf>

<sup>124</sup> Simon Pau Khan En, “Globalization and Inter-Religious Cooperation: A Myanmar Experience,” *RAYS: MIT Journal of Theology* vol. 7 (2006): 126.

durability of nation-states and the rise of enormously powerful nonstate actors.”<sup>125</sup>

Globalization, theologically speaking, has two contrary ethical implications—positive and negative. Positively, globalization brings an increase in productivity and economic efficiency which can raise the standards of living. Through the development and popularization of the Internet and other computer technologies, every form of knowledge is easily available. Negatively, globalization leads to the destruction of jobs, the big gap between rich and poor, owners and workers, the reduction of public services and the ecological devastation.<sup>126</sup> For the Kachin people, globalization is, in this sense, westernization by another name and a new form of colonization. It undermines the integrity of Kachin culture and is, therefore, repressive, exploitative, and harmful to most Kachin people. In addition, the impacts of globalization on today’s Kachin churches create more disadvantages than advantages. The imperialism of Western culture has rapidly dominated the Kachin indigenous culture. The rapid development of communication, transportation and information technologies has profoundly impacted the “ethical life” of the people in today’s Kachin land. As Simon Pau Khan En, a prominent Myanmar theologian, claims, “competition and open market economic system are, as the two sides of the same coin, the two salient characteristics of globalization,”<sup>127</sup> for the Kachin people, globalization is merely the “neocolonialism” of both transnational and national companies.

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<sup>125</sup> Thomas L. Friedman, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree* (New York: Farrar, 1999), xviii.

<sup>126</sup> Fairouz Mustafa Hamdi, “The Impact of Globalization in the Developing Countries,” *Developing Country Studies* vol. 3, no. 11 (2013): 142.

<sup>127</sup> Simon Pau Khan En, “Globalization and Inter-religious Co-operation: A Myanmar Perspective,” *Myanmar Journal of Theology* vol. 5 (2004): 7.

With globalization, poverty levels in Kachin society have worsened. The process of globalization not only worsens the poverty, but also globalizes it. Michael Chossudovsky describes this phenomenon as “globalization of poverty.”<sup>128</sup> The gap between the rich (the haves) and the poor (the have nots) has widened. This creates a terrible social injustice and moral corruption in today’s Kachin churches.

Competitive pressures cause significant unemployment. Those who are poor and less educated, mostly farmers and blue-collar workers, became increasingly anxious about their jobs. For Ruether, “globalization is simply the latest stage of Western colonialist imperialism—the patterns of appropriation of wealth and concentration of power in the West, especially in the hands of the elites of the United States.”<sup>129</sup> Ruether claims that the deepening crisis of the impoverishment of the earth and the majority of its people are caused by the aggressive expansion of corporate globalization, such as “air pollution, and climate change, the undermining of local sustainable farming and the commodification of the gene pool of plants, animals, and humans, the privatization of water, and population explosion and its collision with the war on women’s reproductive rights by conservation religion; and the various aspects of how women are disproportionately the victims of corporate globalization will be elaborated.”<sup>130</sup>

Globalization is very competitive and limited, benefitting only the powerful and the rich. This causes a limited chance of exploring individual freedom, choice and preference. As a result, thousands of Kachin young people from many poor

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<sup>128</sup> Michael Chossudovsky, *The Globalisation of Poverty: Impacts of IMF and World Bank Reforms* (London: Zed Books, 1997).

<sup>129</sup> Ruether, *Integrating Ecofeminism, Globalization, and World Religions*, 1.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

families in rural areas are leaving their home villages for the big cities like Mandalay and Yangon and going abroad to find better jobs for their families' survival. Many parents, especially in the areas of Myitkyina, Waingmaw and Hpakant, are leaving their children at home to earn money in jade mines, gold mines and logging areas. This creates many problems between children and their parents, and husbands and wives. In this situation, poverty results in moral damage on the children and even divorce in the family.

One of the most significant effects of globalization is the homogenization of culture. The mass media promote a global western style "mono-culture" in food, music, movies, dress, sports and literature. It dictates what people must eat, drink, and wear and what they must feel, desire and think. In this way, it is very difficult to preserve any cultural identity or cultural elements. It is undoubtedly true that the Kachin culture has been globalized and become a mixed culture of Westernization.

The process of globalization has been responsible for ecological devastation and environmental pollution in today's Kachin land. Globalization leads to the destruction of jobs, a growing gap between rich and poor; an increase of the individuality and a decrease in being community-minded. Thus, the economic globalization creates a cultural and ecological distress for the Kachin people. The impact of this is that the poor become poorer, and the rich become richer in today's Kachin society. Ethically looking at the ministry of Jesus, the focus was the needy, the poor and the marginalized. Jesus' death on the cross shapes the view of poverty, and it reaffirms Christians ministering to the poor. Hollinger says:

Christians have no option regarding care for the economically disenfranchised and victims of economic injustice within the world.

Scripture is clear in its mandate to pursue justice, to love mercy, and to respond with care to those in economic need. As I John 3:17 puts it, “if anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?” (NIV).<sup>131</sup>

To put it briefly, the Kachin churches have to take responsibility for the poor, needy, oppressed, marginalized, and the outcasts that are victims of economic injustice. Our mission of the church must be characterized by a “preferential option for the poor.”<sup>132</sup> Matsui Yayori insists that it is poor women who suffer most from the impact of globalization because competition among large corporations causes unemployment and casualization of female labors.<sup>133</sup> Thus, without concern for the rights of women, there will be no real social change in Kachin society. The Kachin churches need to find a better way to save many Kachin young girls who are being used as “sex objects” and become infected with HIV/AIDS, subsequently dying at a very young age. Therefore, the Kachin churches have to stand with the poor and with women to work closely together in such a way that they are able to empower themselves and to determine their own lives and future. For this transformation, all the poor and marginalized should organize themselves to join in the process of production and take part in the fruits of their labors. All the Kachin people need to be trained and equipped to be “economically oriented” to prevent them from becoming victims of poverty.

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<sup>131</sup> Dennis P. Hollinger, *Choosing the Good: Christian Ethics in a Complex World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 179.

<sup>132</sup> This term was first formulated at the Third General Conference of Latin American Bishops at Puebla, Mexico in 1979. The word “preference” denies all exclusiveness, as though God would be interested only in the poor, whilst the word “option” should not be understood to mean “optional.” See Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation, 15<sup>th</sup> Anniversary ed., Rev. ed. with a New Introduction*, trans. and eds., Sister Caridad Inda and John Eagleson (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1988), xxv.

<sup>133</sup> Matsui Yayori, “Globalization and Asia Women,” *Globalization and its Impact on Human Rights*, ed., Matthew George Chunakara (Hong Kong: CCA, 1998), 102.

In order to be able to live together in this era of globalization, most of today's Kachin churches have to construct a "global ethic."<sup>134</sup> According to Hans Kung, there are two basic principles for a global ethic. First, every human being must be treated humanely, and secondly, what they wish done to themselves, they must do to others. For such a global ethic, the Kachin churches have to urge both the *Tatmadaw* (the Burmese Army) and international community, especially China and India, to unite in support of a global ethic of common rights and shared responsibilities.

Free market capitalism is based on competition that insists on the "survival of the fittest."<sup>135</sup> In this competition, the big corporations and companies will win, while the weaker local people lose. This concept of "survival of the fittest" threatens both the morality and mentality of the Kachin people. In God's image, all human beings have the same rights to a secure life, equitable treatment, an opportunity to earn a fair living and equal access to the global commons. In order to prevail over the global market force in Kachin society, all the people have to demonstrate a philosophy of "revival of the weakest"<sup>136</sup> against the "survival of the fittest."

The environmental degradation in the form of air pollution, acid rain, tropical deforestation and the thinning of the ozone layer affects the whole earth. This problem is further aggravated by the process of globalization. In fact, the Kachin's experience of ecological crises raises the question of "ecojustice" as an

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<sup>134</sup> Hans Kung, "A Global Ethic as a Foundation for Global Society," *The Globalization Reader*, ed. Frank J. Lechner (Oxford: Blackwell Publisher, 2001), 42.

<sup>135</sup> This is a theory of Charles Darwin and is the norm of "evolutional ethic," that only the strong; the powerful can be able to survive. The world is only for the "fittest." See Peter Singer, ed., *Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 91.

<sup>136</sup> Pau Khan En, "Globalization and Inter-religious Co-operation: A Myanmar Experience," 14.



overriding concern.

The global village has provided new opportunities for the enhancement of the life for the Kachin people. Without a doubt, the Kachin people need to affirm the positive side of the process and development of globalization. Taking globalization from a negative perspective only will not stop its gigantic influence and impact; one need to pursue alternatives to reduce its tremendous repercussions. Therefore, the Kachin people need to find harmony between globalization and localization— “glocalization.”<sup>137</sup>

### C. Consequences of Exploitation of Nature on Women

As a result of looking for new livelihood, people have been faced with new environmental challenges and have started to deal with new lifestyles that encouraged the practice of risky behaviors and also worsened social problems, such as polygamy, extramarital sex, domestic violence, and family separations. The influx of Chinese labor and also people from all parts of Myanmar entered the Kachin state, especially to those business booming places, and produced a mixture of lifestyles that the Kachin people have never experienced before.<sup>138</sup> For example, “women are more susceptible to the impact of displacement regarding decreased income, deprived housing, violence, and limited access to health services, which has led to an increase of in diagnoses of

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<sup>137</sup> This term “glocalization” was first popularized by Roland Robertson. This means that one has to put both the global and the local in the same category. As globalization cannot be stopped one has to think globally and act locally meaning, the local cannot be totally ignored. The term “globalization” was first used by Theodore Levitt in 1985. These statements are taken from the paper of Simon Pau Khan En on *Ecumenical Theology*, presented at the Joint-Workshop of the Judson Research Center, MIT and St. Joseph’s Catholic Major Seminary on *The Wider Ecumenism for Myanmar Churches in 21st Century* (Yangon: St. Joseph’s Major Seminary, November 5, 2005), 6.

<sup>138</sup> May Sabe Phyu, “A Gender Perspective of Displacement and Its Impacts on Health: The Case of the Irrawaddy Myitsone Dam Construction Project in Kachin state, Myanmar” (MA thesis, Asian Institute of Technology, 2011), 62.

tuberculosis, malaria, and HIV/AIDS.”<sup>139</sup> Kachin women are primarily responsible for obtaining and preparing food. Mines make this task vastly more difficult, for Kachin women, because “valuable farmland is frequently seized without any compensation.” Mines in Kachin land “create “deadzones,” where nothing will grow due to the intensity of mining operations, toxic air, and water pollution.”<sup>140</sup> “Mining operations force a rapid shift from a subsistence-based economy to one based on cash. This shift is accompanied by inflation that makes it increasingly difficult for families to purchase basic goods for survival.”<sup>141</sup> Thus, these changes forced Kachin women into the sex industry because they have no other option to provide for themselves and their families.<sup>142</sup> The increasing of physical and sexual violence against women is also closely connected with mining operations. “Women who work in mines often face physical violence at the hands of other miners and especially military personnel guarding the sites.”<sup>143</sup> More importantly, “the rapid in-migration of men to mining sites also leads to increased demand for sexual services. Rape, as well as institutionalized forms of sexual violence, rise as a result.”<sup>144</sup>

EarthRights International further explains that “domestic violence, rape, and prostitution have all increased tremendously” in the Kachin state. “To a significant extent, these social problems are connected to the growth of a cash-based economy.”<sup>145</sup> “The rising cost of basic goods, such as food and medicine, have created immense pressure on women and young girls from desperately poor families to enter into the commercial sex industry, which serves the overwhelmingly male and transient labor

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid., iv.

<sup>140</sup> EarthRights International, “Mining, Gender, and the Environment in Burma.”

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

force. The introduction of brothels and prostitution has altered Kachin society for the worse.”<sup>146</sup> Since most of the employees at the mine sites are men, the demand for sex workers has increased. Consequently, infection rates for sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and HIV/AIDS have exploded, significantly affecting women.<sup>147</sup>

Undeniably, along with the mass destruction of nature, Kachin women have become victims of exploitation. The ecological problem leads to exploitation of women in a manner of poverty and sex marketing. As women are identified with nature, the explorations of ecology and feminism bring together and discover how human domination of nature and men domination of women are interconnected. Women are the primary sufferers of the environmental degradation, such as deforestation, soil depletion, pollution, and poverty.

Due to poverty, thousands of Kachin young girls are involved in “sex business” to support their parents and siblings. With the increase of Burmese and Chinese business companies, mostly in the areas of jade land, Hpakant and gold mines, such as Myitkyina and Waingmaw districts, many Kachin women are used as tools for “sexual entertainment,” and many Kachin women are forced to make that choice because of no other viable economic options, but to become “concubines” of both Burmese and Chinese business men. Today, in Kachin land, there are many Kachin prostitutes in various places, such as karaoke lounges, bars, night clubs, beauty salons, massage parlors, hotels, and brothels. Kachin Development Networking Group states;

Family units are disintegrating because spouses are living apart for long periods of time in mining areas and these areas have spurred a rising sex industry. In 2005, many Kachin young women were recruited to work as cooks in gold mine areas, but were forced into prostitution in the brothels

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<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

there. The Burmese government police officers were involved in this trade by collecting tax. This kind of sex trade in the Kachin state is now common, especially in gold and jade mining areas, and in large towns in Myitkyina.<sup>148</sup>

According to the Kachin Women's Association Thailand (KWAT), Kachin women are being trafficked across the border into China and sold into forced marriages and prostitution.<sup>149</sup> The organization has documented more than 130 such cases during the past year, some including children. Labang Mary, a spokesperson for KWAT, says, "according to the latest information we have received, some parents are selling their own daughters to human traffickers for 12,000 to 13,000 Chinese Yuan (approximately USD 1,800)." She adds that "deteriorating economic conditions in Myanmar are forcing families to resort to ever more desperate measures to pay off debts."<sup>150</sup>

These forms of exploitation connect to the position of women in their traditional cultural practices. The negative views of women as lesser, polluted, and impure led Kachin women to become the sex objects. Whereas husbands are still considered the "household gods," women are regarded as disgraced, polluted, and lower than men. Women's sarongs are never allowed to hang higher because they may pollute the males. Whether old or young, women are prohibited to sit on chairs or lower than men in any worship service in homes or in churches. Wives and daughters are regarded as the

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<sup>148</sup> Kachin Development Networking Group, "Lessons from the Kachin Development Experience," Analysis of Kachin State development based on research from 2005-2012.

<sup>149</sup> Kachin Women's Association Thailand (KWAT) is a non-profit-making organization working on behalf of Kachin women in Myanmar. For more information about KWAT, see <https://web.archive.org/web/20180928040727/https://kachinwomen.com> (accessed September 26, 2018).

<sup>150</sup> In a 2007 report entitled "Eastward Bound", KWAT documented the trafficking of 163 women and girls between 2004 and mid-2007, all to China. While 40 percent of the women simply disappeared, most of the rest were forced to marry men in provinces across eastern China. About a quarter of those trafficked were below the age of 18, while some were as young as 14. Most were sold as brides for an average of about USD 2,000, usually to farmers. Minority Voices Newroom, "Burma: Kachin women trafficked into forced marriages, prostitution in China," <https://web.archive.org/web/20180928040822/http://www.minorityvoices.org/news.php/en/712/> (accessed September 26, 2018).

property of fathers and husbands. Women must be silent in homes and everywhere, including within their homes. For this reason, women's leadership roles in the churches and in the community, are limited and women's ordination is still hopeless in today's Kachin churches.

## CHAPTER THREE

### *KARAI KASANG AND WHITEHEADIAN GOD*

The beliefs of the majority of Kachin Christians have been shaped by the traditional view of God, that God is omnipotent, hierarchical, only transcendent, and patriarchal. Such a traditional view of unilateral power of God is challenged by the process view of God, that God is relational, non-hierarchical, non-dualistic, and transcendent-immanent. The Kachin people of Myanmar have had their own traditional concept of God, *Karai Kasang*, since before becoming Christians. Kachin people call the divine “*Karai Kasang*.” This Kachin concept of *Karai Kasang* is found in their indigenous religion, Nat worship. In this chapter, I explore how Whiteheadian metaphysics and philosophy of theology can deepen the radical understanding of God for the Kachin people of Myanmar. I examine how process theology can help Kachin people find a deeper process understanding of God that integrates better with their indigenous context. I also discuss how the non-patriarchal, panentheistic, and relational Whiteheadian God fits well with *Karai Kasang*.

#### A. The Concept of *Karai Kasang*

Ola Hanson, who created the Kachin alphabet from Roman characters and the translated the Kachin (Jinghpaw dialect) Holy Bible from the original Hebrew Bible, selected the word “*Karai Kasang*” for “God.” Ola Hanson first recognized the footprint

of God, in the Kachin culture, in the form of *Karai Kasang* whom the Kachins knew long before the missionaries arrived.<sup>151</sup>

According to the Kachin creation narrative, *Karai Kasang* does not belong to creation. *Karai Kasang* does not create anything, and no one creates *Karai Kasang* either. The Kachin people believed that there is *Karai Kasang*, someone beyond this creation, but they did not worship *Karai Kasang*. Since *Karai Kasang* did not demand anything from human beings, the Kachins did not give any offerings or sacrifices to *Karai Kasang*. *Karai Kasang* is, however, the merciful one, who is always ready to help the people in need, to do justice if one does injustice to another, to stand for the poor, the orphan, the widow, and the weakest. *Karai Kasang* is an unseen one and no one can see *Karai Kasang*. *Karai Kasang* is, thus, a spirit. Ja Li says that “*Wenyi*” in Kachin dialect means “spirit,” and it refers to *Karai Kasang*. The great or supreme spirit is to be called “Holy Spirit.” That Holy Spirit is known as *Karai Kasang* because *Karai Kasang* is a spirit, and it belongs to a type of Nat.<sup>152</sup>

For the Kachin people, the idea of Supreme Spirit, *Karai Kasang*, is always placed at the highest point. There are many terms and ways of expression of *Karai Kasang*. For example, *Ninggawn Chyanun* and *Hpunggam Woishun* (Universal Parents), *Bum Wa* (the Highest One), *Lamu Madu Ga Madu* (Owner of Heaven and Earth),<sup>153</sup> *Hpan Sagya* (Creator God), “*Hpan Wa Ningsang* (the Creator), *Chye Wa Ningchyang* (the

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<sup>151</sup> See Hanson, *The Kachins*, 168.

<sup>152</sup> Pungga Ja Li, *Jinghpaw ni Hkap la Hkan sa ai Makam* (What Kachin Believe and Practice) vol. 2 (China: Sinpraw Bum Media Group, 2005), 84.

<sup>153</sup> Paw Lu, “God in the National Life of the Kachins,” 37-39.

Omniscient One), *Sumwi Sumdam* (the One Higher than the Clouds), and *N-gawn Karai Kasang* (the Supreme One).”<sup>154</sup>

### 1. *Karai Kasang* is Transcendent-Immanent

In the Kachin concept of Nat worship, *Karai Kasang* is transcendent-immanent. The root word of *Karai* is *Ngarai*, which means “the earth or earthly world,” and *Kasang* derives from *Ngasang*, which means “beyond this earthly world or heavenly world.” Thus, *Karai* means immanence and *Kasang* means transcendence. *Karai Kasang* is a combination of two different, but related words. Without *Karai* there is no meaning for *Kasang*, and *Kasang* does not have any meaning without *Karai*. *Karai Kasang* is, therefore, both transcendent and immanent that empowers and exists within all of creation. This matches Whitehead’s philosophy of organism. Whitehead conceives God as a single actual entity. In God, the physical and mental poles are called the consequent nature and the primordial nature respectively. The two “natures” are distinguishable but inseparable aspects of deity. That is to say, neither can exist apart from the other, and each requires the other. The primordial nature is God’s envisagement of all possibilities.<sup>155</sup> Whitehead’s philosophy is metaphysics of real individuals and, therefore, definitely precludes the dissolution of true individuality that occurs in pantheistic systems. Whitehead says,

...the nature of God is dipolar. God has a primordial nature and a consequent nature. The consequent nature of God is conscious; and it is the realization of the actual world in the unity of God’s nature, and through the transformation of his wisdom. The primordial nature is conceptual; the consequent nature is the weaving of God’s physical

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<sup>154</sup> Hanson, *The Kachins*, 168.

<sup>155</sup> Alfred N. Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, Corrected edition, ed. David Ray Griffin and Donald W. Sherburne (New York: Free Press, 1978), 345.



feelings upon the primordial concepts of God.<sup>156</sup>

*Karai Kasang* is transcendent, but not in the radical way envisioned by traditional theism. Roland Faber argues that “God’s transcendence, but no supernaturalism; God’s immanence, but no pantheism.”<sup>157</sup> Whitehead rejects “the extreme doctrine of immanence” (identifying God with the immanent world order) and “the transcendentalist conception of God as a being external to the world.”<sup>158</sup> Whitehead seeks “a nondualist understanding of immanence and transcendence.”<sup>159</sup> The primordial nature of God transcends the world in the same way that we, in our mental activities, transcend our bodies and surroundings. Completing the analogy, the consequent nature of God is always immanent. Whitehead expresses,

It is as true to say that God is permanent and the world fluent, as that the World is permanent, and God is fluent. It is as true to say that God is one and the World many, as that the World is one and God many. It is as true to say that, in comparison with the World, God is actual eminently, as that, in comparison with God, the World is actual eminently. It is as true to say that the World is immanent in God, as that God is immanent in the World. It is as true to say that God transcends the World, as that the World transcends God. It is as true to say that God creates the World, as that the World creates God.<sup>160</sup>

Taking this into account, Whitehead’s primordial nature of God is similar to the nature of *Kasang*, which transcends the world and the consequent nature of God aligns with the nature of *Karai*, which is immanent. Like the Whiteheadian God, the Kachin concept of *Karai Kasang* develops through the integration of the primordial and consequent natures.

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<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

<sup>157</sup> Roland Faber, *God as Poet of the World: Exploring Process Theologies*, trans., Douglas W. Stott (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 128.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid., 128-129.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid., 129.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid., 348.

## 2. *Karai Kasang* is a Panentheistic God

Charles Hartshorne modifies Plato's world-soul analogy. According to this interpretation, "Plato came close to Hartshorne's view that 'the world is God's body.'" This is not to say that God has a location within the universe, but that the location of the universe is in God, for the divine being-in-becoming is all inclusive."<sup>161</sup> Hartshorne expresses this view: "panentheism— everything (pan, all) is in (en, in) God (theos, God). Panentheism is a mediating position between pantheism and classical theism. For pantheism, the world is identical to God; for classical theism, the world is completely external to God; for panentheism, the world is within God."<sup>162</sup>

The world is the body of God. "The philosophy of organism that denies mind-matter dualism easily leads to this analogy. The soul is a personally ordered society giving coherence and unity to the various nexus of living and non-living actual occasions in the human body."<sup>163</sup> As the soul is present to the body to coordinate actual entities in the world, coordinating all activity.<sup>164</sup> An understanding of God, which takes seriously this view is termed "panentheism."<sup>165</sup> According to Faber, "panentheism interprets the *biblical God*, who is anticipated eschatologically as the God who will be "all in all" (1 Corinthians 15:28)."<sup>166</sup> He highlights that, "it is in this way that God and

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<sup>161</sup> Donal Viney, "Process Theism," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, July 29, 2004, revised on April 3, 2018. <https://web.archive.org/web/20181020005701/https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/process-theism/> (accessed September 10, 2018).

<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

<sup>163</sup> Marc A. Pugliese, *The One, the Many, and the Trinity: Joseph A. Bracken and the Challenge of Process Metaphysics* (Washington D.C., Catholic University of America Press, 2011), 55-56.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid. This term, "panentheism," was first coined by German idealist philosopher Carl Christian Friedrich Krause (1781-1832). See David H. Nikkel, "Panentheism," in *Encyclopedia of Science and Religion*, ed., J. Wentzel Vrede van Huyssteen, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York, Macmillan Reference USA, 2003), 642.

<sup>166</sup> Faber, *God as Poet of the World*, 124.

world “become” for *each other*. In this sense one can cautiously agree with Hartshorne’s description of the world as the “body” of God and God as the “soul” of the world.”<sup>167</sup>

The dipolar concept is part of panentheistic view of God as an all-encompassing, all-knowing, and all-feeling entity. God is not identical with the world, as in pantheism. God retains God’s independent self-identity that transcends the earth, but the world is also contained within God.<sup>168</sup> God experiences and feels our feelings and sufferings as we experience and feel. Thus, all non-divine individuals are included in God and are within in the divine life. God is panentheistically active and therefore God coinheringly empowers all that exists without externality, mediation or loss.<sup>169</sup> David Nikkel states that “panentheism offers an organicistic understanding of the God-world relationship in contrast to deism’s mechanistic understanding. Like deism, panentheism offers a concept of God where natural laws or processes are respected, where God refrains from interventions that overturn nature. The crucial difference is that panentheism posits a God intimately involved, continuously interacting, with the world.”<sup>170</sup>

One can easily make a connection between Whitehead’s concept of God and the Kachin concept of Nats. Both Whitehead and the Kachin concept of Nats view God as panentheistic—who is in everything, and everything is also a part of God. For Whitehead, the consequent nature of God is “the physical prehension by God of the actualities of the evolving universe.”<sup>171</sup> Since the primordial nature of God by itself is

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<sup>167</sup> Ibid., 123.

<sup>168</sup> David H. Nikkel, *Panentheism in Hartshorne and Tillich: A Creative Synthesis* (New York: Peter Lang, 1995), 2-3.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>170</sup> Nikkel, “Panentheism,” in *Encyclopedia of Science and Religion*,” 642.

<sup>171</sup> Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 88.

deficient in actuality, the consequent nature is “the completion of God’s nature into a fullness of physical feeling is derived from the objectification of the world in God.”<sup>172</sup> There are two claims about God’s consequent nature. First, “God prehends every component of the satisfaction of every actual occasion; nothing in the domain of finite actuality is excluded. Thus, this Whitehead expresses in the image of a tender care that nothing be lost.”<sup>173</sup> Secondly, “the consequent nature weaves all these feelings of the actual world into one unity of feeling. Just as in all other actual entities, God’s concrescence is a process by which he brings a diversity of prehensions into one fully determinate unity. The achievement of every actual occasion in the antecedent universe is preserved by its integration into the harmony of God’s satisfaction.”<sup>174</sup>

The Nats function in two ways that demonstrate an interconnectedness with *Karai Kasang* when taking into account the dipolar nature of God with Kachin Nat worship. This is accomplished by the Nats providing and enforcing moral law between the land and its people. Laws make the Kachin responsible for the resources they use and its proper appropriation of just living. This relates to the *Karai Kasang* in that the *Karai Kasang* “lures” what is best for not only for the people, but also for the whole of creation—forests, mountains, rivers, skies, and so on.<sup>175</sup> This shows that through the Nats, “*Karai Kasang* prehends every moment of actual occasion” and the Nats are, therefore, “an extension of the feelings and the prehensions of *Karai Kasang*.”<sup>176</sup>

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<sup>172</sup> Ibid., 345.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid., 346.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid.

<sup>175</sup> Zau Sam and Rafael Reyes III, “Response of the Kachin Nat Worshippers to Present Ecological Concerns,” 5.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid.

Additionally, the Nats represent *Karai Kasang*'s immanence within forests, mountains, villages, skies, etc. They are the supernatural extension of *Karai Kasang*. *Karai Kasang* is the mediator of spirits, causing change and moving the hearts of the Kachin people and interacting with both Nats and Kachins to encourage harmony. As a result, they provide a connection with *Karai Kasang* as the Giver of Life, who is noncreated, interconnecting with all living things, this emphasizes *Karai Kasang*'s immanence and connection with the world.<sup>177</sup>

In this sense, process theology is very helpful for understanding the nature and power of *Karai Kasang* as panentheistic. Carol P. Christ explores a deeper meaning of female images of divine power from a process feminist perspective, including Goddess. She suggests that "process theology's notion of panentheism provides a way of understanding God that moves beyond the polarities of immanence and transcendence and a way out of the impasse created by understandings rooted in classical dualism."<sup>178</sup> A panentheistic theology allows Kachin people to take the idea of immanence seriously while preserving the idea of transcendence. In this worldview, there is no elsewhere *Karai Kasang*, but rather, an everywhere *Karai Kasang*, the encompassing *Karai Kasang*.

### 3. *Karai Kasang* as a Relational God

Concerning the understanding of *Karai Kasang*, a majority of Kachin Christians have been shaped by the classical Christian view of God—God is omnipotent, dualistic,

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<sup>177</sup> Ibid., 5-6.

<sup>178</sup> Christ, *She Who Changes*, 66.

hierarchical, only transcendent, and patriarchal. Such a classical Christian view of the unilateral power of God is challenged by the process view of relational power of God—God is relational, non-hierarchical, non-dualistic, and transcendent-immanent. I discuss here how the process views of relational power of God help Kachin people see *Karai Kasang* as a relational God.

Process theology presupposes that everything is “relational” because relatedness is primary, and relational power is the ability *both* to affect *and* to be affected.<sup>179</sup> There is no doubt that, according to Whitehead, classical Christian theology inherited the Semitic concept—an extreme doctrine of transcendence—God is the one ultimate metaphysical fact, absolute and underivative, and who decreed and ordered the actual world.<sup>180</sup> Consequently, most Kachin Christians came to see *Karai Kasang* as absolute and as a wholly other who is always watching over the world from Heaven. They came to believe that the nature and power of *Karai Kasang* is totally independent of this world. *Karai Kasang* is divine, eternal, impassible, and infinite but the world is profane, temporal, passible, and finite. Therefore, *Karai Kasang* is not present in the material world. *Karai Kasang* is always beyond the physical experience. In contrast, the process views of God as omnipresent allows Kachin people to see *Karai Kasang* as both transcendent and immanent—*Karai Kasang* works in the world by continual and universal self-revelation. Every being and thing in every moment is experiencing *Karai Kasang* as the ground of both order and freedom.<sup>181</sup> *Karai Kasang* is *in* and *within* the world rather than *on* or *over* the world.

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<sup>179</sup> C. Robert Mesle, *Process Theology: A Basic Introduction* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1993), 30.

<sup>180</sup> Alfred North Whitehead, *Religion in the Making*, 1st paperback ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 57-60.

<sup>181</sup> Mesle, *Process Theology*, 9.

Classical Christian theology describes God as omnipotent, that is, one who has absolute supernatural power to control all beings and things.<sup>182</sup> God is all-powerful, and predestines from birth to death, even life after death, of humans and all creatures. Mesle claims that “many Christian theologians have held a doctrine of total predestination.”<sup>183</sup> This concept of total predestination or all-controlling power is based on the unilateral omnipotent God. This is the kind of Christian theology that Kachin Christians have today because they all believe that God is all-powerful, all-knowing, and therefore in control of everything. In general, Baptists are not Calvinists, but many of them have held the doctrine of predestination, including the American Baptist missionaries who worked among the Kachin people. On the contrary, process theology denies this notion of God as controlling power.<sup>184</sup> Process theology’s view of the power of God is “persuasive not coercive.”<sup>185</sup> God has no supernatural power to coerce the world, but God works in the world by being responsive and creative. God shares the experience of every momentary creature.<sup>186</sup> Every experience or occasion in the world is affected by God, in Whitehead’s term, the “initial aim.”<sup>187</sup> The occasion receives its initial aim from God is in its own free act of becoming. This means that, according to Coleman, “God influences, persuades, lures or calls us to embrace the principles of God’s vision in every context. Some process theologians have named this aim as the voice of God, the whisper of God, intuition, or

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<sup>182</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>184</sup> John B. Cobb Jr. and David Ray Griffin, *Process Theology: An Introductory Exposition*. (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1976), 9.

<sup>185</sup> Mesle, *Process Theology*, 8.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid., 64.

<sup>187</sup> Marjorie Hewitt Suchcoki, *God, Christ, Church: A Practical Guide to Process Theology*, New rev. ed. (New York: Crossroad, 1989), 39.

God's love for the world.”<sup>188</sup> Thus, a process theological notion of God is non-hierarchical. Suchocki therefore urges that “the God of the entire universe works *with* the world, not *on* the world.”<sup>189</sup>

Whereas the classical God has miraculous power to cause all the things in the world, process God does not have the power to perform miracles. Rather, process God's strength lies in love, patience, not in force. The power of God is the power of love in the process view. Process God does not have hands like humans, but God works through the hands of creatures. For example, Mesle articulates that “God has no supernatural power to coerce the world. But God works in the world for health and healing. God's best avenue to bring about health in the world is by calling people to learn how to heal themselves. God works in the world by being responsive.”<sup>190</sup>

For Whitehead, the power of God is limited. He says, “the limitation of God is God's goodness. God gains God's depth of actuality by God's harmony of valuation. It is not true that God is, in all respects, infinite. If God were, God would be evil as well as good. Also, this unlimited fusion of evil with good would mean mere nothingness. God is something decided and is thereby limited.”<sup>191</sup> The classical Christian view of God is a patriarchal God. Mesle states that “there is certainly much value in the traditional image of God as Father.”<sup>192</sup> Most Kachin Christians were also indoctrinated in a way that *Karai Kasang* is male—a big, old, white man with blue eyes and silver long beard and should, therefore, always be called “Father.” They were taught that to pray to *Karai Kasang* as

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<sup>188</sup> Monica A. Coleman, Nancy R. Howell, and Helene Tallon Rusell, ed., *Creating Women's Theology: A Movement Engaging Process Thought* (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publication, 2011), 17.

<sup>189</sup> Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki, *What is Process Theology? A Conversation with Marjorie* (Claremont: Process and Faith, 2003), 14.

<sup>190</sup> Mesle, *Process Theology*, 64.

<sup>191</sup> Whitehead, *Religion in the Making*, 137-138.

<sup>192</sup> Mesle, *Process Theology*, 68.



“Father.” To do otherwise is totally wrong and against the Bible. In this reading, *Karai Kasang* is totally active, controlling, and independent, and wholly lacking in receptiveness and responsiveness. *Karai Kasang* is the archetype of the dominant, inflexible, unemotional, completely independent male. Process theology rejects this notion of God.<sup>193</sup> According to Cobb, Whitehead stresses “God’s creative love, God’s tenderness, and God’s sharing of human suffering. This is a shift in the balance from traditionally masculine attributes to traditionally feminine ones.”<sup>194</sup> Whitehead’s primordial nature of God explicitly rejects stereotypically masculine attributes.<sup>195</sup> Mesle’s view of God as “nurturing, cherishing, persuading, participating, and suffering with us” seems much closer to feminine images and values.<sup>196</sup>

Suchocki mentions that the biblical texts speak of God in both masculine and feminine terms. In the ancient Hebrew world, the gender most often used for God was male, however, the use of female language was not excluded. For example, God was imaged through female roles such as bearing, nursing, and rearing children.<sup>197</sup> I agree with Suchocki that even though we can use God as male and female, God transcends sexuality and gender.<sup>198</sup> Of course, we cannot limit God within our human languages. God is neither male nor female. But when we talk about the immanence of God in and within us, God includes both male and female. However, we cannot draw a conclusion that the maleness of Jesus is the reflection of God as male. Here, Suchocki also argues that “the gender of Jesus is not a revelation of the gender of God, but the effects of a male

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<sup>193</sup> Cobb and Griffin, *Process Theology*, 10.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid., 133.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid., 135.

<sup>196</sup> Mesle, *Process Theology*, 81.

<sup>197</sup> Suchocki, *God, Christ, Church*, 99-100.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid.

God become the vehicle in a patriarchal society of reversing society's valuation of one gender above another."<sup>199</sup>

In her book, *Sexism and God-Talk*, Ruether also argues that the incarnation of the logos of God into a male is a historical accident, but not an ontological necessity. A classical Christology asserts that just as Christ has to be incarnated in a male, so only the male represents Christ. For Ruether, this kind of male-dominant Christology has emerged as the keystone of the conservative reaction against women's ordination. The possession of male genitalia becomes the essential prerequisite for representing Christ, who is the disclosure of the male God.<sup>200</sup> However, Christ is incarnate in everyone; Jesus is Christ because the incarnation is constitutive of his very selfhood. This concept clarifies Jesus as a fully human person, who speaks and acts on God's behalf. Therefore, from my perspective of process theology, Jesus' maleness is incidental and insignificant. Concerning the incarnation of *Karai Kasang* into the male Jesus, the referent of Christology should not be limited to the historical male Jesus. The divinity of Jesus Christ or *Karai Kasang* does not refer to the historical male Jesus. Christ is a power that continues to be revealed in persons, both male and female, in the present.

Moreover, the classical Christian theology is certainly based on dualism<sup>201</sup>—the separation between God and creation, soul and body, nature and humans, humans and animals, women and men, sexuality and spirituality, nurturance and dominance, immanence and transcendence, femininity and masculinity, and so on. But process theology is non-dualistic view—everything in the world is interconnected, interrelated

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<sup>199</sup> Ibid., 101.

<sup>200</sup> Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-talk: Toward a Feminist Theology with a New Introduction* (Boston: Beacon, 1993), 126.

<sup>201</sup> Cobb and Griffin, *Process Theology*, 148.

and interdependent. Cobb mentions that “value is found in enjoyment, and enjoyment is a characteristic of all living beings.”<sup>202</sup> God and the universe are co-eternal. God always has existed and always will exist.<sup>203</sup> In other words, process theology affirms that everything is “relational” because relatedness is primary. Coleman asserts that relationships are not something we “have,” but rather we *are* relationships and constituted by relationships to other people, to our environment and our God.<sup>204</sup>

Suchocki holds that “God is the most relational reality of all. God relates to the entire world, and human choices to harm or damage others (humans, animals, and environment) are felt by God. God feels everything that happens in just the way that it happens.”<sup>205</sup> Therefore, process theology’s view of God as relational helps the Kachin people understand *Karai Kasang* as a relational God who is different from the classical view of God as unilateral. Then *Karai Kasang* as a process relational God can become both vertical and horizontal relationships with things and all beings whereas the traditional unilateral God is only vertical or top-down or forced ruling on the world.

#### 4. *Karai Kasang* as Universal Parents

It was Ola Hanson who saw the footprint of God in Kachin culture and first recognized the Kachin theology.<sup>206</sup> Once he remarked that the Kachins ascribe to God the creation of the world, and is the all-knowing *Karai Kasang*, the Great Spirit who stands

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<sup>202</sup> Ibid.

<sup>203</sup> Mesle, *Process Theology*, 50.

<sup>204</sup> Monica A. Coleman, *Creating Women’s Theology*, 16.

<sup>205</sup> Suchocki, *God, Christ, Church*, 10.

<sup>206</sup> Ngai Gam, “The Present Trends of Theology,” 86.

above all other spirits.<sup>207</sup> Gustaf A. Sword also describes, through his own personal experience, as follows:

When the missionary came to a large Kachin village, he heard the people cry out, “Oh, God help us!” “God have mercy on us!” “Ah,” the missionary thought, “these folks must be Christians, although I did not know it!” The village was unknown to him and deep in the jungle. Entering the village, he found the people gathered outside one of the houses, and they lifted up their voices towards heaven and called upon the great *Karai Kasang* to come and help them... When he asked them, “Are you Christians?” they shook their heads. The missionary said: “Well, I do not understand, why do you cry out to God for help if you do not worship him? “So, you do believe in God, in great *Karai Kasang*?” The villagers looked at him in great surprise, “Of course we believe in God!”<sup>208</sup>

When we look at this dialogue carefully, we can say that the Kachin God, *Karai Kasang*, is not male; they never call *Karai Kasang* “*Wa*” (Father). It was the American missionaries who came and taught the Kachins to call *Karai Kasang* “*Wa Karai Kasang*” (Father God). This patriarchy supported and strengthened the patriarchal elements of Kachin culture. As a consequence, only men became decision makers, the power holders, the heads of the family, the pastors of the church, and the leaders of the community that represented God “himself.” Mary Daly, in her book “*Beyond God the Father*,” argues that the biblical image of God as a great patriarch in heaven, and “the symbol of the Father God, spawned in the human imagination and sustained as plausible by patriarchy,” has in turn rendered service to this patriarchal society “by making its mechanisms for the oppression of women appear right and fitting.”<sup>209</sup> She writes:

If God in “his” heaven is a father ruling “his” people, then it is in the “nature” of things and according to divine plan and the order of the universe that society be male-dominated. Within this context a

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<sup>207</sup> Sword, *Light in the Jungle*, 63.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid., 61-62.

<sup>209</sup> Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women’s Liberation*, with an Original Reintroduction by the Author, 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984), 13.

mystification of roles takes place: the husband dominating his wife represents God “himself.”<sup>210</sup>

Women ministers are regarded as secondary—listeners, helpers, followers, and assistants for the men ministers. In this sense, to be human is to be male and consequently to be born as a male is the most valuable trait of all. This dualism created a very problematic change, and the egalitarian concept of *Karai Kasang* was lost.

The classical Christian view of God is a patriarchal God. Most Kachin Christians were also indoctrinated that *Karai Kasang* is male and were taught to pray to *Karai Kasang* as “Father.” To do otherwise is totally wrong and against the Bible. In this reading, *Karai Kasang* is totally active, controlling, and independent, and wholly lacking in receptiveness and responsiveness. *Karai Kasang* is the archetype of the dominant, inflexible, unemotional, and completely independent male. According to Cobb and Griffin, process theology rejects this notion of God.<sup>211</sup> Whitehead’s primordial nature of God does not accept stereotypically masculine attributes.<sup>212</sup> This could help Kachin people find a non-patriarchal *Karai Kasang* by overcoming the dualism.

In terms of the birthing concept, one can also assume that there is no connection between *Ninggawn Chyunum* (the universal mother) or *Hpungam Woishum* (the universal father) and *Karai Kasang*. However, if the *Karai Kasang* is the highest spirit being, uncreated and not creating, and ever present, there needs to be some relationship between the highest being, and *Ninggawn Chyunum* and *Hpungam Woishum*, the mother and father of the universe. Here, Sallie McFague proves helpful

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<sup>210</sup> Ibid.

<sup>211</sup> Cobb and Griffin, *Process Theology*, 10.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid., 135.

in developing a framework for seeing *Karai Kasang*'s role in the birthing concept. In *The Body of God*, McFague states that "God's immanence...is empowerment toward the liberation, well-being, and fulfillment of all the bodies within God's body."<sup>213</sup> One can posit that *Karai Kasang* provides empowerment towards the fulfillment of creation of all living things. This empowerment provides the ability of the universal father and mother to beget all living things, while at the same time holding the notion that *Karai Kasang* is uncreated as well as not creating. McFague also states:

God lies, lives, or whatever beyond, beneath, over and under, that and all other attempts at expression. The transcendence of God is in its primary and most important sense the invisible face of God, that aspect or dimension that we never see, never know. It is what God is when God is not 'being God'; it is the mystery, the absoluteness, that relativizes all our notions and models of God; it is the goodness of God.<sup>214</sup>

This contributes to the shaping of *Karai Kasang*'s aspect of non-created, non-creating being. The *Karai Kasang* is the mystery, the absoluteness of spirit, that iconoclastically subverts all ideas of God, because it holds no connection to the other. However, *Karai Kasang* is the empowerment of all that is in the birthing of the universe at all times. *Karai Kasang* is immanent in the world and made known through the Nats and their interaction in the world, existing in the forests, mountains, waters, skies, and villages. One can only imagine that the *Karai Kasang*, as spirit, can be the space where the possibility of birthing is made real. The birthing concept is constantly happening at all times, from human birthing, to forest birthing, to mountain birthing. The *Karai Kasang* is the benevolent spirit, making space for the potential possibility to take

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<sup>213</sup> McFague, *The Body of God*, 192.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid.

place.<sup>215</sup>

Another way the *Karai Kasang* can interact with the birthing concept is found in Jay McDaniel's *Of God and Pelicans*. He describes the Buddhist understanding of "emptiness" as "dependence."<sup>216</sup> Dependence can be understood as the "things that are invariably constituted by other things that are imminent within them."<sup>217</sup> Taking this into account, the *Karai Kasang* is that which is imminent within all things. The *Nats*, as well as the universal mother and father, have within themselves *Karai Kasang*, again depending on *Karai Kasang*. These two emphases, empowerment and dependence, fit well within the narrative accounts of the *Nats* and the birthing concept. They provide a connection as to how the *Karai Kasang* who is non-created and non-creating, can interconnect with all living things. It provides empowerment for the possibility of the birthing of all beings and things. All things and beings, from *Nats* to humanity, depend upon the immanence of the *Karai Kasang*.<sup>218</sup>

When I was in Sunday school 30 years ago, once my Sunday school teacher asked me: Is *Karai Kasang* male or female? "Male," I answered without any hesitation. I was indoctrinated by the Kachin Baptist ministers, that God was male—a big, old, white man with blue eyes and a silver long beard and should, therefore, always be called "Father." I was taught that whenever I prayed without indicating God as "Father," I was totally

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<sup>215</sup> Zau Sam and Rafael Reyes III, "Response of the Kachin Nat Worshippers to Present Ecological Concerns," 7.

<sup>216</sup> Jay McDaniel, *Of God and Pelicans: A Theology of Reverence for Life* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1989), 101-102.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid.

<sup>218</sup> Zau Sam and Rafael Reyes III, "Response of the Kachin Nat Worshippers to Present Ecological Concerns," 7-8.

wrong and went against the Bible. I was taught to believe that God was a “Superman,” all-powerful, absolute controller, and wholly transcendent.

Nat worship is the commonality of cultural identity and the religious foundation of the Kachin people. Nat worship should be, in this regard, both the starting point and the meeting point of the Kachin people. By using process theology, Kachin Christians could recapture their own concept of *Karai Kasang*, that has been indwelling in the life of the Kachins since the beginning. To commit profoundly to a Kachin process theology, Nat worship must no longer be the object of criticism, but rather it should be basis of reenvisioning *Karai Kasang* as relational, non-hierarchical, non-dualistic, and transcendent-immanent. As discussed above, the central tenets of process theology, such as relationality, interconnectedness, interdependence, and the value of nature and harmony, can be integrated with the Kachin indigenous Nat worship to help heal the misconception of God in today’s Kachin churches. I am constructing a Kachin indigenous understanding of God by connecting Whiteheadian perspectives and positive elements of Nat worship, because both the Whiteheadian God and *Karai Kasang* focus on non-dualistic relations. Using them together in the Kachin context is reasonable and applicable.

Because of this, the quest for relational, non-hierarchical, non-dualistic, and transcendent-immanent God, the Kachin people need to reformulate or rebirth their indigenous concept of *Karai Kasang*. Integrating Kachin traditional beliefs with Christianity, Whiteheadian metaphysics and philosophy of theology could open the eyes of Kachin people to find an authentic meaning of God in their own context. This integration could lead Kachin Christians to become more meaningful Christians with a



new adventure of creativity and creative transformation in the churches. This could then help them see Nats as *Karai Kasang*'s representatives on earth. *Karai Kasang* exists through the Nats and works through the Nats. *Karai Kasang* transcends the world as well as *Karai Kasang* is immanent in the world. The Nats are therefore a part of *Karai Kasang* whereas the world is the body of *Karai Kasang*. Because of their subjective immortality, the Nats continue to live and experience themselves in *Karai Kasang*. Through the continual existence of the Nats, *Karai Kasang* is constantly *receiving, integrating, and giving* the world. Insofar as *Karai Kasang* receives the world through the feelings of the primordial and consequent nature, *Karai Kasang* receives the reality of our experiences as male and female and receives them into divine nature. *Karai Kasang* prehends the qualities, which men and women have actualized.

Now, if I were asked the question, "Is *Karai Kasang* a "Superman," all-powerful, absolute controller, and only wholly transcendent?" 30 years ago, I would definitely say, no, because *Karai Kasang* is relational, non-hierarchical, non-dualistic, and transcendent-immanent.

##### 5. *Karai Kasang* and Creation Out of Chaos

The Kachin creation narrative is a birthing concept and is also creation out of *chaos*, but not *creatio ex nihilo*. Originally, before the beginning, there was neither heaven nor earth. There were only wind and clouds. There was a great formless void or space called "*Wawn Sumwa Dam Sumda*" (also known as *Wam Wam Summwi*). The great space exists as unmeasureable, endless, and bottomless without beginning, without

center, and limitless.<sup>219</sup> Then *Wawn Sumwa Dam Sumda* began to shake by itself and at the moment from which *Gattung Kanu* came into existence. As a result, there was a spot of life like the size of a creeper seed or paddy tray that was moving around in the space by itself.<sup>220</sup> This is compatible with Genesis 1:2: “...the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters” (NRSV). According to Gilhodes, “*Wam Wam Sumwi* (male element) and *Nangpang Majan* (a female bird, female element), who lived in different places, but they came near to each other and finally gave birth to many children.”<sup>221</sup> Sumlut Ban Htang points out that this Kachin creation is “the result of the co-creation and collaboration, the loving relationship, of both feminine and masculine elements. This creation myth shows that female and male elements were not personified as man and woman but were formless forces or energies out of which the universe was created.”<sup>222</sup>

The process God is co-creative with all other creatures. For Whitehead, there is no beginning to creation; God and the world are co-eternally creative. Whitehead says, “the world is self-creative,”<sup>223</sup> and “God is not before all creation, but with all creation.”<sup>224</sup> For Whitehead, nothing just exists; everything grows together. God is together with creativity. God cannot be separated from creativity and creativity also cannot be separated from God. Everything grows out of datum and the datum themselves had their own process of becoming; so for Whitehead “it belongs to the nature of a ‘being’ that it is

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<sup>219</sup> Naw La, “The Kachin Traditional Religion and the Gospel,” 3.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid.

<sup>221</sup> Gilhodes, *The Kachins*, 3.

<sup>222</sup> Sumlut Ban Htang, “Christ as Creative Wisdom/Word/Spirit: A Christology from a Kachin Woman’s Perspective” (STM extended paper, Drew University, Madison, NJ, May 9, 2018), 3.

<sup>223</sup> Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 85.

<sup>224</sup> Ibid., 343.

a potential for every becoming.”<sup>225</sup> God plays an essential role in the world’s becoming by being the “actual entity imposing its own unchanged consistency of character on every phase” so that “a definite result is emergent” from the process.”<sup>226</sup> The process God is, therefore, omniscient but not omniscient. The process God knows all there is to be known but will not know the future until it is actualized. Thus, Whiteheadians reject the traditional notion of creation as *ex nihilo* because the notion of creation out of nothing assumes the doctrine of God as Creator and Absolute Controller. Rather, process theology affirms a doctrine of creation out of chaos.<sup>227</sup>

This is also true of Kachin traditional concept of creation. The original Kachin concept of creation is not creation out of nothing, but it is really out of something, or chaos. Thus, *Karai Kasang* is not a creator or absolute controller or hierarchical being who creates the world out of nothing. There is already something before *Karai Kasang*. *Karai Kasang* is together with the creation. *Karai Kasang* is beyond the creation. Every being and thing are birthed by the respective mothers in an evolutionary process and birthing is still ongoing through mothers respectively. Evolution tells us that we are linked to the larger universe and a grand story of life in a prolonged process of becoming. According to John F. Haught, evolutionary theology claims that “the story of life provides essential concepts for thinking about God and God’s creation to nature and humanity.”<sup>228</sup> I therefore agree with Haught that “evolution is God’s way of creating.”<sup>229</sup> For Kachin people, evolution is a way of God’s creating through birthing. Teilhard de

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<sup>225</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>226</sup> Whitehead, *Religion in the Making*, 81-82.

<sup>227</sup> Cobb and Griffin, *Process Theology*, 65.

<sup>228</sup> John F. Haught, *God after Darwin: A Theology of Evolution*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Boulder: Westview Press, 2008), 39.

<sup>229</sup> Ibid., 1.

Chardin also asserts that “the whole universe is in evolution,” and “evolution happens because as God draws near to the world, the world is drawn into God.”<sup>230</sup> Evolutionary theory, therefore, also supports Kachin people to understand in-depth of birthing concept as evolution, but not creation as *ex nihilo*.

This brings us to understand that both the process God and *Karai Kasang* are not all-powerful ones who create everything and every being, but they share the same power source with finite beings. Both the process God and *Karai Kasang*, therefore, do not have absolute coercive power, but only persuasive power. Whitehead asserts, “God’s role is not the combat of productive force with productive force, of destructive force with destructive force; it lies in the patient operation of the overpowering rationality of his conceptual harmonization. God does not create the world, he saves it: or, more accurately, God is the poet of the world, with tender patience leading it by his vision of truth, beauty, and goodness.”<sup>231</sup> Whitehead’s idea of God as poet of the world could help Kachin people see *Karai Kasang* as non-omnipotent, who did not force human beings to worship. This is why Kachins did not give any offerings or sacrifices to *Karai Kasang*. But *Karai Kasang* has a persuasive power and love to help the needy, the poor, the weakest, and the oppressed. Whitehead’s phrase, “God is the great companion—the fellow-sufferer who understands,”<sup>232</sup> could help Kachin people understand their own concept of *Karai Kasang* as the co-sufferer of creation—both the people and the world.

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<sup>230</sup> John F. Haught, *Responses to 101 Questions on God and Evolution* (New York: Paulist Press, 2001), 134-135.

<sup>231</sup> Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 346.

<sup>232</sup> *Ibid.*, 351.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE KACHIN CONCEPT OF ECOLOGY IN NAT WORSHIP

In dealing with the Kachin concepts of Nat worship, the Kachin people have their own meaning of existence; they have their own philosophy or views of life and theology. The Kachins have their own religion which is called the Nat religion. Nat worship for the Kachin people should not be regarded as meaningless and absurd. Rather, there are many invaluable religious concepts and life values in Nat worship. The identity of the Kachin people and their traditional cultural values can be found only in the Nat worship. The belief in the existence of Nats,<sup>233</sup> Nat worship, has been deeply rooted in the hearts of the Kachins for many years. Thus, the urgent theological task is to enrich the gospel message by utilizing the good and valuable elements and the religious practices of Nat worship. Only then the rich cultural heritage can make great contributions to the rootedness of the gospel in today's Kachin community.

As the Kachin concept of ecology is rooted in Nat worship, it is better to begin with the Kachin creation narrative in order to understand the Kachin concept of ecology in Nat worship. I also discuss how the Kachin creation narrative is important to show a

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<sup>233</sup> The Burmese also uses the same word *Nats*. The origin of the word *Nat* is derived from the Sanskrit word "*nath*," meaning, a lord, master, superior, the corresponding form being "*natha*." In his book, *Burmese Sketches*, Taw Sein Ko, an early Burmese researcher mentions that the word *Nat* is, probably indigenous, and the phonetic resemblance is purely accidental because its corresponding forms are found in the language of North Asia. Taw Sein Ko, *Burmese Sketches vol. 1* (Rangoon: British Burma Press, 1913), 156. See Simon Pau Khan En, "Nat Worship: A Paradigm for Doing Contextual Theology for Myanmar" (PhD diss., University of Birmingham, 1995), 59. According to Maung Htin Aung, a Burmese Scholar of the pre-Buddhist religion of Myanmar, the worship of *Nats* was purely native in origin and developed out of that form of animism which still prevails among some of the hill tribes of the country. The term *Nat* originally means a lord and involved an idea similar to feudal over lordship. A *Nat* is a spirit who had some dominion over a group of people or over a certain object. Maung Htin Aung, *Folk Elements in Burmese Buddhism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962), 2.

link between *Karai Kasang*, the Nats, and ecological concerns. Nat worship then will serve as a locus for Kachin theology as it can supply the concept of veneration of nature and the entire creation. I discuss how Coleman's application of subjective immortality could help Kachin people understand the subjective immortality of the *Gumgun Gumhpai Nat* (the ancestral Nats) as the Nats continue to live and experience themselves in *Karai Kasang*. Then I examine how the *Matse Nat ni* (the malevolent or evil Nats) works within a Whiteheadian metaphysics.

#### A. The Kachin Creation Narrative

The Kachin creation narrative has been verbally transmitted from generation to generation. In fact, there are many narrations on the Kachin creation story, but the basic meaning is the same. In the primeval time, when there was neither heaven nor earth, there was *Wam Wam Summwi* (cloud) from which *Gattung Kanu* (a bee-like mother) came into existence. When the birth date was due, the *Gattung Kanu* begot the spirit of the darkness, *Chyip Ningma* (female) and *Hproi Ninghpra* (male).<sup>234</sup> Thereafter *Rip Sumwawp* (female, represented the heaven) and *Hkrip Sumhkrawp* (male, represented earth), *Dum Sumwan* and *Hkrup Sumhkran* (infinity of space) were born.<sup>235</sup> Later, they gave birth to the parents of all living beings and things, *Ninggawn Chyunun* (male originator, the earth,) and *Hpunggam Woishun* (female originator, the heaven). The

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<sup>234</sup> Nngai Gam, "The Present Trends of Theology" (BD thesis, Myanmar Institute of Theology, 1985), 88.

<sup>235</sup> Pungga Ja Li, *Jinghpaw a Hkap la Hkan sa Shatup Lam* (What Kachins Believe and Practice) vol. 1, 130. Also see H.F. Hertz, a Kachin traditional researcher, also mentioned that *Ninggawn Wa Magam* was half spirit and half man who gave shape with his big hammer and beauty to the earth and made it habitable for human beings. He lived in the high mountain called *Majoi Shingra Bum* where he dispensed his blessings upon human beings. See H. F. Hertz, *A Practical Handbook of the Kachin or Chingpaw Language* (Rangoon: SUPDI, GOVT. Printing and Stationery, 1935), 165.

followings are the persons and the things that are begotten by them, *Chyunun* and *Woishun* and they are presented according to the birth order.<sup>236</sup>

1. *Myen Lap Shamyen* (a disliked thing). 2. *Hpan Wa Ningsang, Chye Wa Ningchyang*, who was whispering in the mother's womb, speaking as soon as he was born. When the parents asked who he was, he answered that he was "*Hpan Wa Ningsang* (the Creator), *Chye Wa Ningchyang* (the Omniscient One)."<sup>237</sup> When the parents asked him whether he knew his parents and grandparents, grandparents and the created things before him, he said that he knew them all. That is why the Kachins take him as God, the preexistent Christ. John 1:1 clearly equates "the Word" with God; in John 1:14 it becomes clear that "the Word" is Jesus. In John 1:18 some translations call Jesus "God the One and Only" (NIV).<sup>238</sup> He also gave names, purpose and meaning to all the coming things.

3. *Bungga Wa* (air); When *Bungga Wa* blew *Myen Lap Shamyen*, the latter became two parts; the upper part became heaven (*sumsing lamu*), and lower part became earth (*ginding aga*). 4. *Di Munu, Dumlang E Hku* (water). 5. *Ninghtoi Gintawng* (big star) and *Nlung Hpungdawng* (a great pillar of heaven). 6. Fly. *Chye Wa Ningchyang* said that it would be food for swallow, when it flew to see how wide the earth was. 7. *Lamu Pilan* (a swallow which could see how wide heaven and earth are). 8. *Sup Shi Majan* (female), the mother of all kinds of trees. 9. *Sup Nang Majan* (female), the mother of all kinds of animals. 10. *Hkrik Kahkrawp Majan* (female), the mother of all kinds of bee. 11. *Kum Grang Majan* (female), the mother of iron. 12. *Jum Majan* (female), the mother of

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<sup>236</sup> Nngai Gam, "The Present Trends of Theology," 88.

<sup>237</sup> Hanson, *The Kachins*, 168.

<sup>238</sup> Robert W. Yarbrough, "God," *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996), 408.

salt. 13.<sup>239</sup> *Ndoi Lum Jan* (female), the mother of fishes. 14. *Sinpraw Na Hkreng Garep* and *Sinna Maga Na Chyang Kahtep*, the east and the west. 15. The twins; *Nhtoi Ginsan* and *Nsin Majan* (male and female), light and darkness. *Chyunun* and *Woishun* continued to give birth to various Nats and *Hpan Wa Ningsang* assigned them the following duties to perform. 16. *Mahpum Dingnu*, the one who cares about all mothers and children and is offered sacrifice on the occasions of childbirth. 17. *Sa Nu Du Wa Sa Pawt Kaba*, the one who supports humankind. 18. *Darawng Kanu*, *Dara Wahku* and *Ningdum Kanu*, *Matsa Wa Hku*, who judge and punish those who lie especially in the time of contention.<sup>240</sup>

Nngai Gam explains that all Nats were appointed by *Hpan Wa Ningsang* to carry out special tasks: to keep, guard and bless humankind in times of need. They are living laws for the people but when the people worship them (laws), they become idols or false gods. They became the objects used as the tools by the people for their own selfishness. They harmed the people when they did not receive offerings from the people. The same thing happened to the Jews at the time of Jesus that the laws became idols for them, consequently, lost original purpose of laws. Nats are appointed by *Hpan Wa Ningsang* for human beings as the laws are for the Jews.<sup>241</sup>

19. The twins who have no breath. Having no breath, the parents gave no report to *Hpan Wa Ningsang*. They threw them away into *Majoi Maling* (the forest). *Hpan Wa Ningsang*, however, knew that they gave birth to something, and he ordered the parents to pick them up. He cut their umbilical cords and named them *Wa Hkan Bai* and *Uhprun Gai Nat* who became the guards of the foundation of the city. After that *Chyunun* and

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<sup>239</sup> Nngai Gam, "The Present Trends of Theology," 88.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid., 89. Also see Nngai Gam, "The Kachin Theology," 166-168.

<sup>241</sup> Ibid.



*Woishun* stopped giving birth because they became too old. *Hpan Wa Ningsang* made them youthful again and they again gave birth to the following.<sup>242</sup>

20. They gave birth to one thing which was big at the bottom and at the top. “What is this?” they asked *Hpan Wa Ningsang*. It is *Ja Mai Lawn, Gumhpraw Mai Lawn* (golden gourd and silver gourd), answered by *Hpan Wa Ningsang*. It would be used when a child is born breathless as an instrument for artificial breathing. 21. They begot a long rod called *Shadawn Woiren* (measuring rod), which would be used by *Ninggawn Wa Magam* for measuring the earth. 22. They gave birth to *Napawn Sumdu* (a hammer), which would also be used by *Ninggawn Wa Magam* for leveling and smoothing the earth.<sup>243</sup>

23. After that *Chyunun* and *Woishun* stopped giving birth because they became too old. *Hpan Wa Ningsang* made them youthful again and they again gave birth the following: (i) The twins: a brother and a sister called *Shanu Nem* and *Shawa Nang* were begotten. They will become the parents of the coming generations after *Chyunun* and *Woishun* stopped giving birth.<sup>244</sup> (ii) Again, they gave birth to something like mucus. When they asked *Hpan Wa Ningsang*, “What Is this?” It is *Nam Tsing Lamun, Num Rawng Ningsum* (Nat of allergy), replied by *Hpan Wa Ningsang*. (iii) They begot the one as tall as the tallest tree and as tough as the threshing stone. *Hpan Wa Ningsang* explained to the parents that he was *Ninggawn Wa Magam*,<sup>245</sup> the one who would level

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<sup>242</sup> Ibid.

<sup>243</sup> Ibid.

<sup>244</sup> Nngai Gam, “The Present Trends of Theology,” 89.

<sup>245</sup> Hertz, *A Practical Handbook of the Kachin or Chingpaw Language*, 166. All the Kachins claim that their primal ancestors lived at “*Majoi Shingra Bum*” or “Plateau.” This mysterious place is, believed by the majority Kachins, seemed to be somewhere beyond the *Mali Hka Hku* (the head-waters of the Irrawaddy River) up the *Mali Hka* branch of the river. However, it does not need any stretch of imagination to identify it with some part of *Majoi Shingra Bum*, a “fairly plain” or “High Table-Land,” literally translated is a “Naturally Flat Mountain of the Eastern Tibet. Though the exact location is unknown, many

and smooth the earth by using *Mapawn Sumdu* (leveling hammer) and measure it with *Shadawn Woiren* (measuring rod). (iv) Again, they gave birth to the twins; a brother and a sister called *Mawa Hpung Gummawn* and *Htang Nang Majan*. They would be the leaders when human beings climb down from the celestial plane to the terrestrial plane, called *Dinghta Ga* (the earth).<sup>246</sup>

24. When *Chyunun* and *Woishun* ceased giving birth because of old age, their son and daughter—*Shanu Nem* and *Shawa Nang* continued to carry on with the creation work by giving birth to the following: (i) *Mahtum Gam Chyaulung, Sut Wa Lung Hkrung*; he presides over the heavenly council called *Mahtum Mahta rung* and blesses humankind; he is one of the great heavenly Nats. (ii) *Munu* (thundering Nat). (iii) *Mahtum Wa Ningshe* (also thundering Nat). (iv) *Mu Lan Ningban, Shinglung Mahtan* (ladder between heaven and earth). (v) The Twins: *Shata Tang Gumseng* and *Jan Hkin Neng* (the moon and the sun). (vi) The Twins; *Madai Tang Neng* and *Ningdim Pri Neng* (Madai Nat). There are two kinds of *Madai Nat*; *Madai* of heaven and *Madai* of the earth. Only the rich could worship them. The *Madai Nat* is honored by the ceremony called *Manau* Celebration.<sup>247</sup>

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authors suggest eastern Tibet or farther to the northeast. Four great rivers are, in the ancient Kachin oral traditions, mentioned; the *Mali Hka* (Irrawaddy River), the *N Mai Hka* (the east fork of the Irrawaddy River), the *Nshawm Hka* (probably the Dihing of Assam, and the *Hpunggawn Hka* (mostly likely the Brahmaputra). For more information in detail, see Hanson, *The Kachins*, 16.

<sup>246</sup> Ngai Gam, "The Present Trends of Theology," 90.

<sup>247</sup> Ibid., 90. The *Manau* celebration or festival is the heart of the Kachin people. The *Manau* is the great religious dance and the most conspicuous and characteristic among the Kachin traditional dances. It is given by only by hereditary chiefs and rich men who, by special request and privilege, are authorized to sacrifice to the *Madai* Nat, the Nat of prosperity. On that occasion, Nats of all kinds are recognized by giving them sacrifice. In the *Manau* celebration a mass dance is made. The Nat priests narrate the Kachin myth of the creation story that usually takes four days. The whole meaning of existence is dramatized, and the whole Kachin understanding of the existence can be seen in this celebration. According to the myth, the *Manau* first began by the *U-Myin* (a kind of bird) organized of *HkungrangU*, the owner of the *Manau* and *U Tawng* (peacock) as the leader of the *Manau*. There are , generally, twelve kinds of *Manau* such as *Sut Manau* (dancing blessings and prosperity), *Padang Manau* (dancing at the celebration of success in war), *Kumran Manau* (perform when the children and the relatives are to be separated to move to the other

25. *Hpan Wa Ningsang* said to *Shanu Nem* and *Shawa Nang*; “Now there were enough Nats, so you two have to beget human beings who would tend the earth.” Before giving birth to human beings, *Shanu Nem* and *Shawa Nang* gave birth to the following human-like creatures: (i) Frog: It claims that it is a human being, but, *Hpan Wa Ningsang* explained that it is not a human being; it is a frog that would dwell in pond. (ii) Chimpanzee: It also claims that it is a human being. *Hpan Wa Ningsang* says it is a chimpanzee who lives in the forest. (iii) Monkey: It claims that it is a human being; but *Hpan Wa Ningsang* named it as a monkey who enjoys the outskirts of paddy field.<sup>248</sup> (iv) Finally, *Shanu Nem* and *Shawa Nang* gave birth to *Mashang Wa Hku* or *Mashang Lahkum* (a big human egg) by the order of *Hpan Wa Ningsang Chye Wa Ningchyang*. *Mahtum Gam Sinlap* operated it with needles and treated it with great and tender care. Eight human couples were born, eight human males and eight human females, and also came *Nga Shaga* (buffalo that can speak), *Sut Ginshang* (treasure basket), *Sut U* (bird of prosperity), and many types of things for the use of human beings.<sup>249</sup>

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place), *Ju Manau* or *Si Manau* (dancing in the funeral ceremony), *Kumrum Manau* or *U Tut Manau* (perform when the brothers and the sisters, those who are separated for a long time, meet again), *Hkri Dip Manau* (perform when a new house, place, or village and a new country have been found), *Majan Rawt Manau* (dancing for empowerment before marching to the war), *Gumtai Manau* (celebrated by a *Duwa*) when he has only a son and asking for giving his son to have a long and prosperous life), and *Jubili Manau* (this is an American Christianized *Manau*, a celebration of thanksgiving for the anniversary of (25) years, (50) years, (75) years as well as the Centenary). Generally, there are (8) *Manau Shadung* (*Manau* Dancing Pillars), decorated by many beautiful colors, especially red, yellow, green and white, with the respective traditional design. For more details about the *Manau*, see Lahpai Zau Nu, *Naushawng Hpaji* (The Art of The Manau Leader) (Manje, 1994), 8-15. Although we no longer sacrifice to the Nats, since becoming Christians, we still celebrate the *Manau* Festivals as our Traditional and National Identity. The past *Manau* festivals have included, the Centenary Celebration of Kachin Baptist Mission celebrated by the Kachin Baptist Convention from December 11 to 25 in 1977, Nawngnang, Myitkyina and the *Myitkyina Majoi Niggawn Hkrum Ra Manau*, and Myitkyina in 2001 (Unity *Manau*), celebrated by all the Kachins around the world, and are the historic *Manau* festivals.

<sup>248</sup> Ibid.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid., 91.

## B. The Beginning of Kachin Nat Worship

Depending on the different *Jaiwa* (saga-tellers), there are many narrations concerning the beginning of Nat worship in Kachin society. According to Pungga Ja Li, a Kachin oral traditional researcher and Kachin theologian, the Kachin people used to worship “*Shinglim Shingtawn Nat*” (a kind of basils) first before they came to worship the Heavenly Thunder Nats. Some story tellers believed that worshipping *Shinglim Shingtawn Nat* was probably adopted from the tradition of *Gorkha* (Indian). Until today the *Gorkha* tribes of Indian are worshipping *Shinglim Shingtawn Nat* everywhere. Later, the Kachins were not pleased to worship that Nat, so they turned to the Heavenly Thunder Nats (*Mu Nat Ni*). In the Kachin mythology, the Heavenly Thunder Nats (*Mu Nat Ni*) did not demand human beings to worship them, rather it was the people who wanted to worship those Nats.<sup>250</sup>

After *Chyunun* and *Woishun* had created all things, they made a “being” called “*Ninggawn Wa Magam*” who was half-spirit and half-man. *Ninggawn Wa Magam*, with his big hammer, “gave shape and beauty to the earth and made it habitable for human beings.”<sup>251</sup> *Ninggawn Wa Magam* lived in the High Mountain called “*Majoi Shingra Bum*” where he shared his blessings upon the people. Once, he called the various tribes of human beings to give them books of knowledge, silver, gold as well as the Nats. On their first journey home, the Kachin people lost the *Shan Hpyi Laika* “Book of Parchment” or the “Lost Book” which contained the instructions of *Ninggawn Wa Magam*. As a result, the Kachins did not know why they were being called, so they came only with the small

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<sup>250</sup> Ja Li, *Jinghpaw a Hkap la Hkan sa Shatup Lam* (What Kachins Believe and Practice) vol. 1, 30-31.

<sup>251</sup> Hertz, *A Practical Handbook of the Kachin or Chingpaw Language*, 166.

bags (*dah*). The other tribes: Shans, Bamars, and Chinese came with large baskets and managed to carry away the silver and gold.<sup>252</sup>

When *Ninggawn Wa Magam* called human beings again, the Kachin people came with large baskets called “*Shingnoi*,” thinking gold and silver would be distributed like the first time. However, to their dismay only the Nats were distributed this time. Shans, Bamars and Chinese could not take away many Nats since they brought only small bags. The Kachins had their large baskets filled with the Nats, and they carried them to their homes where they had been offered to the Nats since that time.<sup>253</sup>

### C. The Meanings and Different Types of Nats

As many Nats were born to be served by human beings, Nats are none other than the living, spiritual laws. Nats are appointed for the welfare of human beings even though some Nats cause harm to human beings. Heaven is watched by the Nats of heaven, the earth by the Nats of the earth, and the forests, the mountains, rivers and tress by their respective Nats. Crimes, such as murder, theft, and adultery are impossible to occur since there is no place that Nats do not watch. The Kachin Nats can be classified into three types as follows.

#### 1. The *Matsaw Ningtsa Nat Ni* (The Benevolent Nats)

The following Nats are appointed by *Hpan Wa Ningsang* to take good care of the people. (a) *Lamu Madai Nat* (Sky Nats). These Nats are to bless the families, especially

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<sup>252</sup> Ibid.

<sup>253</sup> Ibid.

the landlords.<sup>254</sup> (b) *Ga Shading Matsu Nat* (Earth Nats). They are given sacrifices by the chiefs of the lands when dedicating new villages, new lands and other yearly religious rituals. (c) *Sinlap Nat* (Celestial Nats). They are appeased by the *Duwa ni* (the chiefs) at the entrance of the village every year. (d) *Mu Nat* (Thunder Nats). These Nats are appeased by the villagers led by the chiefs in the rainy season. These Nats came to the villagers' rescue when thunder struck them. (e) *Nbung Bung Hpoi Nat* (Wind Nats). The Wind Nats are appeased when the paddy fields have plenty of moisture and are free from disease. (f) *Janhku Nat* (Sun Nats). The Sun Nats are given sacrifices at the entrance of the village annually so that the villagers would enjoy good health. (g) *Shata Nat* (Moon Nats). These Nats often come along with the Sun Nats. Thus, the altar for the Moon Nats is made next to the high altar for the Sun Nats.<sup>255</sup>

All these benevolent Nats are appeased when the villagers desired blessings and protection. The altars for these Nats are made in different styles, with fine decoration. When something dreadful occurred in the village, such as fire, thunderstrike, wild animals such as tigers killing people; it was ascertained which Nat was offended by divination.<sup>256</sup> These benevolent Nats dispensed all kinds of blessings to human beings and only occasionally harmed human beings. Offerings are, therefore, made to the Nats as an incentive to bless human beings. Among the benevolent Nats, the Nats of the heaven are most important. According to the Kachin myth, the daughter of the youngest

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<sup>254</sup> Naw La, "The Kachin Traditional Religion and the Gospel," 24.

<sup>255</sup> Ibid., 25. Also see Lahtaw Gam, *Jinghpaw Wunpawng Sha Ni a Nawku Htung Prat Ladaw Masum* (The Three Parts of the Kachin Religion) (Manmaw: Hanson Memorial Press, 1994), 16.

<sup>256</sup> Divination is very important factor in the religious life of the Kachin community and is a wider application. There are numerous methods of divination. In fact, in almost any situation of importance, it is necessary to call the *Ningwawnt* (the diviner) who by his art ascertained the will of the Nats, the cause of the trouble and the sacrifice demanded. For more information about divination, see Hanson, *The Kachins*, 135-138.

heaven Nat was married to a man, the son of the first ancestor of the Kachin *Duwa*, thus, making this Nat the “*mayu*” (the family of the woman) of all the *Duwas*. At times of the sacrifice to this important Nat, the *Duwas* are given special place.<sup>257</sup>

## 2. The *Gumgun Gumhpai Nat Ni* (The Ancestral Nats)

The Kachin people used to worship the *Gumgun Gumhpai* Nats throughout the history. The *Gumgun Gumhpai* Nats are the spirits of the dead ancestors who are recognized as leaders, chiefs, genius who died mostly wars, battles, and other accidents.<sup>258</sup> In the Bamar Nat worship, the most prominent Thirty-Seven Nats<sup>259</sup> are believed to be the spirits of deceased human beings who, because of their violent deaths, became Nats. Maung Hting Aung describes that;

The tragic lives of the Thirty-Seven and the manner in which they died roused feelings of horror and pity in the minds of the people. It was a

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<sup>257</sup> Tegenfeldt, *A Century of Growth: The Kachin Baptist Church of Burma*, 40-41.

<sup>258</sup> Nhkum Paw Lu, “God in the National Life of the Kachins” (BD thesis, Myanmar Institute of Theology, 1993), 31. Rev. Dr. Nhkum Pawlu is currently the pastor of Canaan Kachin Baptist Church, Lancaster, PA.

<sup>259</sup> There are a variety of lists by many scholars, including Noel F. Singer. His lists are comprised of the following Nats: 1. *Thagya Nat* (Indra or Sakra). 2. *Mahagiri Nat* (Lord of the Great Mountain). 3. *Hnamadawgyi Nat* (Great Royal Sister of the Mahagiri). 4. *Shwe Nabe Nat* (Lady Golden Sides). 5. *Thon Ban Hla Nat* (Lady Three Times Beautiful). 6. *Taungoo Mingaung Nat* (King Mingaung of Taungoo). 7. *Mintara Nat* (King Hsinbyushin Tharabyar of Ava). 8. *Thandawgan Nat* (Ye Phar). 9. *Shwe Nawratha Nat* (The young prince). 10. *Aungzawmagyi Nat* (Captain Aungzwa). 11. *Ngazishin Nat* (Lord of the Five White Elephants). 12. *Aungbinle Hsinbyushin Nat* (Lord of the White Elephant from Aungbinle Lake). 13. *Taungmagyi Nat* (Lord of Due South also known as Shin Nyo). 14. *Maung Mishin Nat* (Lord of the North, also known as Shin Phyu). 15. *Shindaw Nat* (Lord Novice. Death caused by a snake). 16. *Nyaunggin Nat* (Old Man of the Solitary Banyan Tree). 17. *Tabinshwehti Nat* (King of Burma). 18. *Minye Aungdin Nat* (Brother-in-law of King Thalun). 19. *Shwe Sit Thin Nat* (Prince Shwe Sit Thin). 20. *Medaw Shwe Saga Nat* (Lady Golden Words). 21. *Maung Po Tu Nat* (A Shan Tea merchant of Pinya). 22. *Yun Bayin Nat*. 23. *Maung Minbyu Nat* (Prince Minbyu). 24. *Mandalay Bodaw Nat* (Lord Grandfather of Mandalay). 25. *Shwebyin Naungdaw Nat* (Elder Brother Inferior Gold). 26. *Shwebyin Nyidaw Nat* (Younger Brother Inferior Gold). 27. *Mintha Maungshin Nat* (Prince Shin). 28. *Htibyusaung Nat* (Lord of the White Umbrella). 29. *Htibyusaung Madaw Nat* (Lord of the White Umbrella). 30. *Pareinma Shin Mingaung Nat* (The Usurper Mingaung of Pareinma). 31. *Ming Sithu Nat* (King Maungsithu). 32. *Min Kyawzwa Nat* (Prince Kyawzwa). 33. *Myaungpet Shinma Nat* (Lady of the North). 34. *Anauk Mibydd Nat* (Queen of the Western Palace). 35. *Shingon Nat* (Lady Hunchback). 36. *Shingwa Nat* (Lady Bandy Legs). 37. *Shin Nemi Nat* (Commonly known as Ma Hnai Galay). See Noel F. Singer, *Nat-Pwe: The Thirty-Seven Nats* (Scotland: Paul Strachan-Kiscadale, 1992).

gesture of defiance against Fate and Death on the part of the common people that they were worshipped as gods and goddesses after their death.<sup>260</sup>

The term, Thirty-Seven Nats, is never used by the Burmese. They use the term “Thirty-Seven Lords” (Thonze Khunna Min) instead. Their overlordship was both territorial and personal. Currently, the idea of overlordship has disappeared, because when the Burmese king fell in 1885, all his lords, including the Thirty-Seven, fell with him. However, the devotees of the cult still turn to them for protection and assistance. The Thirty-Seven Nats are anthropomorphic, as they accept the offerings of food, pickled tea, toddy-wine, and clothes are hand made. Some gods have special likes and dislikes. In other words, they are real persons, and in times of danger and disaster the people believe that the Thirty-Seven Lords are always with them.<sup>261</sup> These Thirty-Seven Nats are made by human beings to serve their particular purposes and to meet their various needs. To some extent, these Nats are recognized as *Eindwin or Einsaun Nat* (Household Guardian Nats), *Ywasaun Nat* (Village Guardian Nats), and *Mizain-hpazain Nat* (Hereditary Nats).<sup>262</sup> Characteristically, these Nats are similar to the *Gumgun Gumhpai* Nats. Even though the *Gumgun Gumhpai* Nats were sent off properly by priests, their dead spirits refused to go to the ancestral abode. They were wandering in the midst of human beings and demanding to be worshipped and offered sacrifices. These *Gumgun Gumhpai* Nats can harm the members of the family. Some outstanding ancestral Nats are helpful; they are appeased in times of warfare to help their people in fighting against their enemies.<sup>263</sup>

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<sup>260</sup> Maung Hting Aung, *Folk Elements in Burmese Buddhism*, 105-106.

<sup>261</sup> Ibid.

<sup>262</sup> Pau Khan En, “Nat Worship: A Paradigm for Doing Contextual Theology for Myanmar,” 422-425.

<sup>263</sup> Paw Lu, “God in the National Life of the Kachins,” 31.



When the villagers are going to wage a war, they begin by giving sacrifices to their respective *Gumgun Gumhpai* Nats, like *Ngaw Wa*,<sup>264</sup> so that they could hopefully win the war. These Nats always predicted the success or defeat of the war and the villagers followed their advice, which was known through the divination of the priests. If the people failed to offer those sacrifices, troubles and problems in the village, such as people becoming ill or a tiger making a meat of villagers. The *Dumsas* would divinize, and the result was that the ancestral Nats were asking for the sacrifices. Thus, with great care they were to be appeased according to the divination.<sup>265</sup>

Every family has its own household Nats, which are honored in a special sanctuary at a corner of the house. This sanctuary is the restaurant where they come to the feast when they are invited. The number of protecting Nats depends more or less on the houses. In general, the heads of families have arranged “a special worship for *Madai*, *Sinlap*, *Jan Wa*, the Sun, the Moon, *Jahka* (the great War Nat), the shades of the ancestors.” Gilhodes explains, “the common people have especially the household gods, the souls of their ancestors and sometimes *Hkring Wan* (an evil Nat), *Jan Wa* (a Nat of Riches) and some other great Nats because although the common folk do not have the right of honoring the person of some great Nats, like *Jan Wa*, they are nevertheless entitled to worship their portraits.”<sup>266</sup> Each family, depending on their social status, honors some evil Nats such as *Jahtung* (a cruel monster), with the hope of propitiating

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<sup>264</sup> This is the outstanding ancestral Nat of the *Lahtaw* clan. Each clan, in Kachin tradition, has its own ancestral Nat. For example, the ancestral Nat for the *Maran* clan is *Ning-yan Naw*, *Jinwa* is of the *Marip* clan, *Kaw Ja* is for the *Nhkum* clan, *Chyanun Jan* is of the *Lahpai* clan and so on. For more details, see Ja Li, *Jinghpaw a Hkap la Hkan sa Shatup Lam* (What Kachins Believe and Practice) vol. 1, 50-51.

<sup>265</sup> Hanson, *The Kachins*, 136.

<sup>266</sup> Gilhodes, *The Kachins*, 84.

them and make them guardians to drive away the *Sawns* (evil Nats attacked women), the *Phyis* (wizard) and other inferior Nats.<sup>267</sup>

The altars for the *Gumgun Gumhpai* Nats are built inside the house, not outside, so that they can be called upon whenever the householders are in need. For instance, when certain domestic animals like pigs, cattle, or buffaloes were lost, the owner would go to the indoor altar with some water and pour on the altar through a leaf and asked for help from their *Gumgun Gumhpai* Nats, called “*Ga mahtan ai*” (engaging by words). The ancestral Nats may then bring the lost domestic animals home.<sup>268</sup>

### 3. The *Matse Nat ni* (The Malevolent Nats or Evil Alien Nats)

These Nats are evil or alien spirits, and cause harm to the people when they are offended. Some of the malevolent Nats are as follows:<sup>269</sup>

(a) *Jahtung* (a cruel monster). *Jahtung* dwells in lonely places such as forests, caves, waterfalls, etc.<sup>270</sup> *Jahtung* can bite the persons who arrive in his territory to hunt or to fish. When a person became ill after returning from the forest, that individual was

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<sup>267</sup> Ibid.

<sup>268</sup> Naw La, “The Kachin Traditional Religion and the Gospel,” 27.

<sup>269</sup> According to Lahtaw Gam, there are thirty malevolent Nats, such as *Jahtung Nat* (a cruel monster), *Ga Nat* (earth Nat), *Hka Nat* (water Nat), *Jaga Nat* (housekeeper Nat), *Maraw Nat* (misfortune Nat), *Jan Hku Nat* (housekeeper Nat), *Ningsu Nat* (evil Nat), *Ningsin Nat* (dark Nat), *Shadip Nat* (earth Nat), *Yahtu Nat* (animal keeper Nat), *Yumwu Nat* (housekeeper Nat), *Mawlam Nat* (housekeeper Nat), *Sawn Nat* (evil Nat), *Ndang Nat* (childbirth Nat), *Sawa Nat* (evil Nat), *Lasa Nat* (evil Nat), *Shapawt Nat* (spell Nat), *Nampum Nat* (spell Nat), *Pukma Nat* (flower Nat), *Hpyi Nat* (wizard), *Lamum Nat* (spell Nat), *Gumju Nat* (spell Nat), *Kagyin Nat* (ant Nat), *Lasawk Nat* (evil Nat), *Ahpyit Nat* (ghost Nat), *Nbya Nat* (fetus Nat), *Ayu Nat* (rat Nat), *Alawng Nat* (witchcraft), *Hkyusau Nat* (bewitched Nat), and *Mandan Nat* (bewitched Nat). Lahtaw Gam, *Jinghpaw Wunpawng Sha Ni a Nawku Htung Prat Ladaw Masum* (The Three Parts of the Kachin Religion), 17.

<sup>270</sup> Hanson, *The Kachins*, 157.

bitten by the *Jahtung* Nat. The *Jahtung* Nats would be appeased by offering appropriate sacrifices to them.<sup>271</sup>

(b) *Sawn Nandang* (Evil Nats attack women). These Nats are those who cause problems, such as death, for the women in times of childbirth. Women who died in childbirth become *Sawn Nandang* Nat themselves.<sup>272</sup> They often dwell in forests near the villages. Lahtaw Gam describes, “if a woman dies in childbirth, the necessary ceremonies will be attended to, because otherwise, the woman becomes a *Sawn Nat*, whose aim is to inflict the same problems to others.”<sup>273</sup>

(c) *Lasa Nat* or *Sa Wa Nat*. The *Lasa Sa Wa* Nats are the evil spirits that try to make people die a violent death.<sup>274</sup> These are the dead spirits who died in accidents and became evil Nats. These evil Nats can then cause accidental deaths and induce fear in others. Individuals who died in accidents themselves become *Lasa Nat* or *Sa Wa Nat*.<sup>275</sup> According to Tegenfeldt, the three Nats above, “*Jahtung Nat*, *Sawn Nandang Nat* and *Lasa Nat* are the ones who bring bad luck in hunting and fishing.”<sup>276</sup>

(d) *Sutnam Nat*. Hanson clarifies, “*Sutnam Nat* is a gnome or female hobgoblin. A single hair from one of these creatures ensures wealth and power. In many locales, the *Sutnam* is identified with a “wild man of the woods,” called *Chyawoi*. Sometimes, this

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<sup>271</sup> Lahtaw Gam, *Jinghpaw Wunpawng Sha Ni a Nawku Htung Prat Ladaw Masum* (The Three Parts of the Kachin Religion), 38.

<sup>272</sup> Ibid., 173-174. See also Tegenfeldt, *A Century of Growth*, 47.

<sup>273</sup> Ibid., 162.

<sup>274</sup> Gilhodes, *The Kachins*, 241.

<sup>275</sup> Tegenfeldt, *A Century of Growth*, 47.

<sup>276</sup> Ibid. There are also other evil Nats. *Nsin Nat*: It is the evil Nat who dwells in the darkness and makes trouble to human beings. It is feared because it can be easily offended. *Hka Sin Nat*: This evil Nat dwells in the water is a guardian to water and has to be offered sacrifices if it is offended. *Hkring Wan Nat*: This evil Nat dwells around the villages, around the paddy fields and gives troubles to those who are weak in spirituality, called “*gying kya ai wa hpe kawa ai*”. All goes well for the villagers if it is appeased properly. *Jaga Nat*: It is the evil Nat who cause harm sores and skin diseases to the people. Also see Naw La, “The Kachin Traditional Religion and the Gospel,” 29.

Nat appears in visible form. A person may die when he/she sees this Nat.”<sup>277</sup> This Nat is a female since it has breasts that reach her ankles. That Nat has only one eye in the middle of her forehead, her nose grows up side down, and her heels grow in front.<sup>278</sup> However, this *Sutnam Nat* is not to be worshipped, appeased, or sacrificed.

(e) *Maraw Nats*.<sup>279</sup> These Nats are the ones that cause the people misfortune. There are Thirty-Nine *Maraw Nats*. They are jealous, full of revenge, and their particular vocation is to observe and punish anything arousing pride, jealousy or contempt. Whether good or bad, these evil spirits act according to the words spoken by people. Therefore, the Kachins are careful to speak about anything or anyone for fear of what the evil spirits will do. There are many different kinds of *Maraw Nats*; “*Sin Chyawoi Janja Doi*, the fate of darkness, the mother of all fates and the most difficult to propitiate; *Nhtum Du, Sa Wa Kanu*, the mother of accidents; *Sa Wa Nu, Sa Hti Du*, the mother of accidents and the lord of expiring breath; *Hku Maraw, Ra Nhkaw*, the fate of friendship whose jealousy is proverbial, and *Nga Li Du, Nga Htung Kanu*, the dryad of the plantain groves who knows all that happens on the road.”<sup>280</sup> The most common fates are the *Kajai Maraw*, the fate of current reports, the genius of aspersion, and the *Matsa Maraw*, the demon of curses and maledictions.<sup>281</sup>

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<sup>277</sup> Hanson, *The Kachins*, 157.

<sup>278</sup> Ibid.

<sup>279</sup> The ancestry of the *Maraw Nats* should be traced to the *La N-Yaw*, the sixth born of the primeval Nats. The primitive Nats are born of *Kringkrawn* and *Kringnawn*, who themselves are the children of wind and clouds. There are seven Nats indicate their station, order of birth and work, *La N-Gam*, the *Jahtung*, the first born and the glorious chief. *La N-Naw*, the celestial *Sinlap*, the flower of gold: *La N-La*, the protector of the fields, the common laborer; *La N-Tu*, the origin of strength and the strong arm. *La N-Tang*, the Lord of the sun; *La N-Yaw*, the Nat of wealth (*Madai*), the father of the Fates (*Maraw*); and *La N-Hka*, the glorious light, the source of wisdom. See Hanson, *The Kachins*, 156.

<sup>280</sup> Ibid., 158-159.

<sup>281</sup> Ibid., 159.

(f) Witchcraft and Spells (*Hpyi Lamun, Yu*). The beliefs in witches and wizards are common all over Myanmar. A witch is, from a Kachin point of view, a person with two souls; one is his own and the other belongs to a Nat. There are two kinds of witch spirits; “the *Lamun*, which is comparatively harmless, causing sores or minor troubles, and the *Yu* (rat), which in the shape of a rat enters and eats out the inside of a person.”<sup>282</sup> Gillhodes classifies the types of the Witchcraft into five: *The Matsa Kanu* (*matsa* means curse and *kanu* means mother) “is very malignant and can harm their enemies, often coupling it with *Matsa Marawng*.”<sup>283</sup> He explains, “the *Matsa Kanu* in general does not cause very serious illnesses, but she does bring about a desire for sleep, takes away the appetite, and inflicts belly-aches, vomiting blood, etc.”<sup>284</sup> The *Tingshawng* consists of magic formulas which the priests recite when accidents occur. The *Lawng* is performed by uttering charm words on objects (needle, penknife, hairs, lead, iron, leather, wax, etc.) which afterwards fly away into the chest of the person aimed at and cause his death or at least a severe illness.<sup>285</sup>

The *Phyi* is “the seventh soul of certain persons, which may be called wizards. This Nat is said to be a very bad sprite, which can harm the neighbors, but in most cases, it follows its own whim and is unknown to its masters. The *Phyi* can turn itself into a mouse, *lasawp* or a worm. Under the shapes of *lasawp*, it enters the body, devours it by bits and causes death if it attacks the heart.”<sup>286</sup> To expel the *Phyi*, a *Dumsa* has to sacrifice a pig near the house or in the woods. Among many owners of the residence of

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<sup>282</sup> Ibid., 144.

<sup>283</sup> Gillhodes, *The Kachins*, 231.

<sup>284</sup> Ibid., 232.

<sup>285</sup> Gillhodes, *The Kachins*, 231-232.

<sup>286</sup> Ibid., 233.

small spells, “the chief ones are *Kusa* or *Gawsa* and *Kausut* or *Shapawt*. These Nats cause skin disease only. The *Kusa* causes itching, small pimples, tumors, and abscesses.”<sup>287</sup>

#### D. The Faith and Practices of the Kachins in Nat Worship

The spirituality of the Kachin people can be found in the Nat altars and shrines, offerings and sacrifices, the rites and ceremonies and the religious functions of the priesthoods.

##### 1. The *Numshang* (Nat Altars) and the *Nat Ra* (Shrines)

The typical Kachin village has an entrance-altar called “*Numshang*.” “On each side of the road are placed a certain number of short, squared posts called “*laban*,” covered with grains, weapons, household articles and ornaments.” These are called the “prayer-posts.”<sup>288</sup> This figure is the most desired and valuable to the community. Behind the prayer-posts are a number of altars and shrines, to which are tied innumerable bamboo sections wrapped up in large leaves, and all these things are usually put under tall and venerable trees. These things are sacred to the Nats, the divinities worshipped by the *Duwa* as representative of the village.<sup>289</sup>

Another peculiar place is the enclosure dedicated to the Nats of the earth called “*Shadip*” or “*Shadip Matsu Nat*,” where offerings are made on special occasions. There is

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<sup>287</sup> Ibid., 233-234. Among the Kachins, the basic difference between the activities of a witch and a sorcerer is that the witch is possessed by a witch spirit, often unconsciously, and exercises his/her banal influence by psychic powers. The sorcerer calls upon the spirits through certain rituals and enlists their aid in causing misfortune to fall upon one’s enemy. For more information, see Tegenfeldt, *A Century of Growth*, 51.

<sup>288</sup> Hanson, *The Kachins*, 39.

<sup>289</sup> Ibid.

also a small hut or house without walls for offerings of annual harvest sacrifices at “*Numshang*.” “It is used for presenting in case of a blood feud or if the payment of a debt had been unduly delayed. The aggrieved party would try to force a speedy settlement by taking possession of the “grove,” and from there direct their operations towards the village.”<sup>290</sup>

Generally, the altars are small tables or shelves that are made of wood and bamboo. “Taking the altar of the *Mu Nat* (the sky Nats) as a sample, with a small log freshly cut from the jungle; this, having the length of eight or nine feet, is split about two-thirds down into four parts and are bent outward for the support of a wicker shelf or table about a foot-and-a-half square.”<sup>291</sup> Small bunches of elephant grass, “*Kumba*,” “are tied to the corners of this shelf and the whole is raised and fixed into the ground. The altar remains in place until it falls down from decay or is run over by cattle.”<sup>292</sup> Hanson remarks, “the crosses to which cattle are tied when sacrificed are made up of two heavy pieces of timber, fixed into the ground and tied together. The sacrifice is not hung up on the cross, but only tied to it while killed. Only the head or the skull is hung up on one of the posts.”<sup>293</sup>

There is also a “*Nat Ra*” (Shrine) in every Kachin home. The Kachin house is divided into certain number of fireplaces; these may be rooms with partitions. Above the chief fireplace is the sacred corner, with a shelf-like “altar” dedicated to the family Nats.

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<sup>290</sup> Ibid.

<sup>291</sup> Ibid., 155.

<sup>292</sup> Ibid.

<sup>293</sup> Ibid., 156.

Trespassing into this place is especially disrespectful, and care should be taken not to touch or handle the religious emblems that may be close at hand.<sup>294</sup>

## 2. The Offerings and Sacrifices

The Kachins make offerings and sacrifices to the various Nats whenever the occasion demands, as in time of sickness, when undertaking a journey, planning a raid before clearing the jungle for the new paddy field after the harvest, at births, marriages, and deaths, or before raking down a house or at a house-warming.<sup>295</sup> The offerings and sacrifices, at different times, consist of water, liquor, rice, vegetables, dried fish, eggs, fowls, pigs, cows and buffaloes. A small part of the sacrificial animal is placed upon the altar while the rest is eaten by the people. Dogs are offered to *Sawn Nat* and *Jahtung Nat* in case of offerings made for immoral and corrupt persons. In that case, a goat is tied and hooked turned in different directions, or an “X-shaped Cross” is fastened to the goat’s back, and it is then driven out into the dense jungle, from where it cannot return.<sup>296</sup> This practice is very similar to the Levitical rite; “Aaron shall present the goat on which the lot fell for the Lord, and offer it as a sin offering; but the goat on which the lot fell for Azazel shall be presented alive before the Lord to make atonement over it, that it may be sent away into the wilderness to Azazel” (Leviticus 16:9-10, NRSV). According to Andrew H. Trotter Jr., “the Old Testament sacrifices are shown to be but shadows of the real sacrifice of Christ on the cross because of Aaron’s sinfulness. An imperfect high

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<sup>294</sup> Ibid., 41-42.

<sup>295</sup> Gilhodes, *The Kachins*, 97.

<sup>296</sup> Ibid., 94. Also see Hanson, *The Kachins*, 154.



priest cannot offer a true sacrifice, just as the blood of bulls and goats could never truly pay for the offense of human sin or be a substitute for the shedding of human blood.”<sup>297</sup>

Offerings to the *Ga Nat* (the earthly Nats) are not to be eaten. They are cooked and burned at a certain place where no one may trespass. These sacrifices are made “before sowing and after the harvest.” A special offering is made at the *Numshang* in order to avoid great calamities such as contagious disease, failure of crops, great storm, numerous fires, cattle disease or war.<sup>298</sup> Hertz mentions, “in case of serious illness or matters of great importance when some of the greater Nats must be appeased, new altars are erected in front of the house. The Kachins, however, are not limited to these places, but can erect an altar and make an offering to the Nats anywhere.”<sup>299</sup>

All smaller offerings are given whole, wrapped in leaves and hung on the shrine or altar. Water and liquor are presented in bamboo sections, eggs are strung up on bamboo splits and are seen hanging somewhere in the house, especially near the front door where they are presented to the Nats. When cattle or buffaloes are sacrificed, only a very small portion of every part of the body are collected and wrapped with leaves and cooked. The recitation of the priests to the Nats is made two times before and after killing. After cooking the sacrificed animal, the little packages which included all parts of the body is again presented as the same way of the recitation before the killing.<sup>300</sup>

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<sup>297</sup> Andrew H. Trotter Jr., “Atonement,” *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1996), 44.

<sup>298</sup> Hertz, *A Practical Handbook of the Kachin or Chingpaw Language*, 168.

<sup>299</sup> Ibid.

<sup>300</sup> Naw La, “The Kachin Traditional Religion and the Gospel,” 40.

### 3. The Roles and Functions of the Priesthoods

In the Kachin Nat worship, there are special functions of the priesthoods. Just as there is a hierarchy among the Nats, there is also a hierarchy among the priesthoods in Kachin Nat worship. The most important and highest one is the *Jaiwa* (the saga teller), the high priest, under the *Jaiwa*, the second important figure, the *Dumsa* (the regular priest). The *Hkingjawng* (the ritual butcher) and the *Hpunglum* (the assistant ritual butcher) are under the *Dumsa*. Then under this priestly set-up, there are the *Ningwawt* (the diviner) and the *Myihtoi* (the prophet). All the practitioners have their own functions and different roles. Among the Kachins, both man and woman can become a religious priest or practitioner through training and ability rather than by birth.

#### The *Jaiwa* (The High Priest)

The highest religious authority in Kachin Nat worship is the *Jaiwa*, a story-teller, who has learned the folklore which is handed down from generation to generation in poetical parallelism. These stories are usually repeated at weddings and at the great Nat festival called *Manau* Ceremony.<sup>301</sup> The *Jaiwa* does not need to be a *Dumsa* although the *Dumsa* may learn the *Jaiwa* language,<sup>302</sup> and they usually learn both.

Hanson remarks that the *Jaiwa* is familiar with the whole Kachin history, tradition and religion, from creation to the present day. The *Jaiwa* usually recites “in rhythmic language at the wedding and the *Manau* for three days and four nights. He never makes

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<sup>301</sup> Hanson, *The Kachins*, 152.

<sup>302</sup> Both the *Jaiwa Ga* and the *Dumsa Ga* are the ancient Kachin Languages, like Hebrew and Greek. It is very difficult and rarely to meet the person who understands and speaks such a great, old, invaluable language. These languages are used in communicating with the Nats by the *Jaiwa* and *Dumsa*. As we need Hebrew and Greek to get the authentic original meaning of the word in the Bible, the Kachins use the *Jaiwa Ga* and *Dumsa Ga* for a deep understanding of Nat worship.

mistakes as to form and substance, but the vocabulary and phraseology are left to a large extent to the choice of the individual.”<sup>303</sup> Hanson explains, “women and children may know very little of what is said, but all have a general idea as to meaning and importance. Those who want to become a *Jaiwa*, must learn the formulas and pay a price for the instruction. It is not determined by heredity and is open to all who are willing to learn the various posts used in calling upon the Nats. The *Jaiwa* is liberally paid for his services usually, with cattle and gongs.”<sup>304</sup>

#### The *Dumsa* (the Regular Priest)

The *Dumsa* is, as an important figure next to the *Jaiwa* in the religious practices and is the one who has learned the *Dumsa Ga*, or language in addressing the Nats, in which the Nats are invoked to accept the offering and restore health and blessings. The *Dumsa* “is determined by the progress he has made in committing to recite the various posts used in addressing the Nats when offering eggs, dried fish, fowls, pigs and buffaloes.”<sup>305</sup> Ordinarily, the *Dumsa* speaks as other Kachin people do, but when addressing the *Mu Nat* or *Madai Nat* (the sky Nats), the *Dumsa* “wears a long gown and a hat decorated with feathers of birds and boars’ tusks.”<sup>306</sup> Hanson divides the functions of the *Dumsa* into three grades:

Three grades may be recognized; those who can pronounce a blessing on ordinary occasions; those authorized to sacrifice to the ancestral spirits (tsu dumsa); and those who minister to the terrestrial and celestial nats (ga dumsa).<sup>307</sup>

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<sup>303</sup> Hanson, *The Kachins*, 152.

<sup>304</sup> Ibid., 153. See also Hertz, *A Practical Handbook of the Kachin or Chingpaw Language*, 167-168.

<sup>305</sup> Hertz, *A Practical Handbook of the Kachin or Chingpaw Language*, 167.

<sup>306</sup> Ibid.

<sup>307</sup> Hanson, *The Kachins*, 153.

All the *Dumsas* must learn special formulas, and their priest-ship is not given heredity. Anyone can become a *Dumsa*. It is also the duty of the *Dumsa* to send the *minla*, soul of the deceased, to the ancestors. The Nats do not allow the *Dumsa* to do the priest's work for himself. He has to ask another *Dumsa* on his behalf.<sup>308</sup> It is the *Dumsa* who, as a rule, prays for all, for the chiefs as well as for the people. Undoubtedly, in a calamity, individuals make invocations and even add good words to the small offerings they make to the household gods to prove to them that they are not forgotten. The proper formulas of prayers are the *Dumsa*'s responsibility. They generally accompany the sacrifices and continuous repetitions made to beseech the Nats to accept the sacrifices they offer them, and to grant the favors requested.<sup>309</sup>

#### The *Hkingjawng* (A Ritual Butcher)

The *Hkingjawng* is a ritual butcher; he cuts the victims and chooses the meat for the Nats. He divides the sacrifice and arranges the different parts that are placed upon the altar and wraps them in special leaves according to the recognized rites. *Hkingjawng*'s most important work is selecting the meat for the Nats. If the *Hkingjawng* forgets something or even upsets the order of the menu, the Nats will not accept the offerings and ask for new offerings to be made.<sup>310</sup>

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<sup>308</sup> Gilhodes, *The Kachins*, 86.

<sup>309</sup> Ibid., 85-86.

<sup>310</sup> Ibid., 88.

### The *Hpunglum* (Assistant Ritual Butcher)

The *Hpunglum* is the assistant of the *Hkingjawng* as well as another assistant of the *Dumsa*. The *Hpunglum* works as a cook, or chief cook, because he has scullion boys working as he directs. The animal is sacrificed and flushed out. The meat is then cooked thoroughly.<sup>311</sup>

### The *Ningwawt* (The Diviner)

The duty of the *Ningwawt*, the diviner, is to decide whether the Nats demand an offering. He can consult the Nats and foretell the future. The *Ningwawt* is not a priest, but receives only a small remuneration and is called only for inconsequential cases. The *Ningwawt* can consult the Nats to determine what offering is to be made and whether the offering sacrificed is acceptable to the Nat.<sup>312</sup>

### The *Myihtoi* (The Prophet or Medium)

In his *Dictionary of the Kachin Language*,<sup>313</sup> Ola Hanson defines *Myihtoi* as a “Nat-prophet” or a “seer,” the one with the enlightened eye; in poetry called “*Nat Lahkum*,” a Nat’s chair. The word, “*Myihtoi*,” “*myi*” means “eyes,” and “*htoi*” means “to be light” or “illuminated.” The *Myihtoi* is, using the *Myihtoi Ga*, the figurative language used by a Nat-prophet, a medium by whom the Nats speak and make known their will or

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<sup>311</sup> Ibid., 89.

<sup>312</sup> Hertz, *A Practical Handbook of the Kachin or Chingpaw Language*, 166-167. There is also another sorcerer, like the *Ningwawt*, called the *Kumhpan*. The *Kumhpan* is just an ordinary sorcerer who seems to be instructed by *Karai Kasang* himself. He makes known what there is in a closed box, how many buffaloes we have, which are the lucky days, to what Nat we must make an offering and what we must give to be cured of diseases. He is consulted for an ordinary case, he has a right only to a small salary and generally is satisfied with a meal. Also see Gilhodes, *The Kachins*, 89.

<sup>313</sup> Hanson, *A Dictionary of the Kachin Language*, 451.

the future.”<sup>314</sup> The *Myihtoi* is the one who has his eyes enlightened and is supposed to have a close relationship with the world of Nats. When his body is being summoned to the Nats, it becomes the medium through which the Nats make known their desire to human beings. The *Myihtoi* is “consulted only in cases of great importance such as making war, or a raid or when trying to find out whether a certain person is a witch or not.”<sup>315</sup>

#### 4. The Ritual Performances

Hanson mentions that “the offering required is ascertained, and preparations are made accordingly. If the sacrifice demanded is not obtainable or is beyond the means of the party for the time being, a promise is made that the offering will be arranged as early as possible, and as a token, a small parcel containing some meat tied to a bamboo hoop is placed in an appropriate place.”<sup>316</sup> Hanson further explains, “when the day of the offering has arrived, the altar is made, the sacrifice is brought forth, and the kettles are set boiling.”<sup>317</sup> Then the priest begins his long recitals. Depending on the occasion, the recitals are varied. The ritual performances vary as different Nats are addressed. The usual order is as follow:

(1) The Nat concerned is addressed. Each Nat has its own address. (2) Then the Nat is praised on “his greatness, ability and willingness to help.”<sup>318</sup> (3) The response, to express the hearing of the request and willingness to help, is recited by the priest as the

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<sup>314</sup> Gilhodes, *The Kachins*, 87.

<sup>315</sup> Hertz, *A Practical Handbook of the Kachin or Chingpaw Language*, 167.

<sup>316</sup> Hanson, *The Kachins*, 160.

<sup>317</sup> Ibid.

<sup>318</sup> Hanson, *The Kachins*, 160.

Nat is responding. (4) “Statement of the case, help desired for whom or what; the Nat is implored to help the suffering people.”<sup>319</sup> (5) “The Nat asking particulars as to offering, altar, priest, place and time.” It is to be assured according to the ancestral customs, rules and regulations. (6) The time, place, and other particulars of the sacrifice are arranged in advance. (7) Then the sacrifices are slain and distributed. (8) Then, the priests exhort the Nat to accept the offering, alleviate the troubles and return to the heavenly abode.<sup>320</sup>

## 5. The Ritual Occasion

(1) “Appeasing the offended Nats” is very crucial in the Kachin religion. There are many ways to appease the Nats according to the different situations. If a woman dies in confinement, the necessary ceremonies must be attended to” including burning the corpse. Otherwise, the woman becomes a *Sawn Nat* who harms others in a similar manner.<sup>321</sup> (2) “Protection and immunity from danger” is closely related to this. In this case, “it is prevention rather than cure.” When a person faces misfortunes, sacrifices are made to the Nats. In the war, sacrifices are made to the Nats to achieve success.<sup>322</sup> (3) “Causing insanity” among the common people is the *Madai* or *Shadip*’s main job. When all sacrifices have been done, a young buffalo or a goat is to be selected and after appropriate ceremony, “a part of the clothing of the afflicted party is tied to the horns, and the animal is sent off into into the dense jungle.”<sup>323</sup> Hanson clarifies, “if the animal does not return, it is taken as a sign that the Nat has departed, and no further trouble will

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<sup>319</sup> Ibid., 161.

<sup>320</sup> Ibid.

<sup>321</sup> Ibid., 162.

<sup>322</sup> Ibid.

<sup>323</sup> Ibid., 163.

occur. If it returns, no one lays claim to it, and no one will kill or eat the flesh as it is dedicated and belongs to the Nats of insanity.”<sup>324</sup>

(4) Sacrifices are offered to these Nats for wealth and prosperity. The Kachins offered a number of animals, large and small, to many Nats who can bless them. The Kachin people perform a great religious dance called “*Manau*” to praise and to gain merits from the Nats. (5) “The sacrifices and the festivals connected with sowing and harvest” are taken for the “goodwill of the guardians of home and village.”<sup>325</sup> When the land preparation work for the plantation for the year begins, a small offering must be given. A great festival led by the *Duwa*, as representative of the whole community, is held before the harvest at the village entrance called *Numshang* so that the blessing of the *Ga Nat*, the *Shadip* (the earth Nat) will be granted.<sup>326</sup> The Kachins believe that the grain has its spirits. Thus, when the harvest is not successful, they try to find out why and appease the offended Nat according to the demand. It is called “*yi moi ai*” or “*nmut moi ai*.” Here, the Kachin people thought that the paddy plant is like a human being. It can be sick, and Nats are to be appeased as if a person falls sick.<sup>327</sup>

When the grain is ripening, the “first fruit” is gathered and eaten by the family that made the first sowing. Then “new rice,” the feast of the new rice called “*Nlung Nnan Sha Poi*”<sup>328</sup> can be prepared and eaten by all. This is a time of rejoicing, and families come together in reunion. “Threshing a kind of thanksgiving is also observed during the

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<sup>324</sup> Ibid.

<sup>325</sup> Ibid.

<sup>326</sup> Ibid., 164.

<sup>327</sup> Naw La, “The Kachin Traditional Religion and the Gospel,” 60.

<sup>328</sup> Today, the Kachin Christians are still celebrating this “*Nlung Nnan Sha Poi*,” the feast of the first fruit, in every village, not sacrifice to the Nats but to God. Every family who has paddy field or slash and burn field make their own “*Nlung Nnan Sha Poi*” in the home and also for all the villagers, the church celebrates this feast as one of the great occasions. This is really a time of joy and thanksgiving usually celebrated during the last week of November and the whole month of December.



time of harvest. The “spirit of the rice” is invoked and requested to remain in the granary so that there may be no loss and that seed for the following year may be abundant.”<sup>329</sup> (6) Generally, “sacrifices are offered to secure help in times of illness.”<sup>330</sup> The Kachin people believe that every affliction is caused by the Nats. The belief that the Nats alone can help has developed fatalism to a certain extent in regard to health. Therefore, sacrifices are made by the ritual performances to the respective Nats according to the divination.<sup>331</sup>

## 6. The Ritual Ceremonies

Among the ceremonies, *Jahtawng Htu* (the Natal ceremony), *Hkungran Poi* (the Marriage ceremony) and *Makoi Mayang* (the Funeral ceremony) are the most important and significant in Kachin Nat worship. A general concept and practice of these ceremonies will be briefly discussed as follow.

*Jahtawng Htu* (the Natal ceremony): As soon as the child is born, one of the attendant women has to pronounce the name once the gender of the infant is known to “prevent ill-disposed Nats from naming the child first, as in such a case the child, will become sick and die.”<sup>332</sup> After naming the child, the natal cutting ceremony will follow. If everything is successful a small meal called “*chyayen*” is eaten by the elderly persons. After this, there is a regular feast called “*Jahtawng*” in which all are allowed to partake. According to Sinwa Awng, dried meat and ginger are the main dishes for *Jahtawng* because the evil Nats are afraid of dried meat and ginger.<sup>333</sup> During eating and drinking,

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<sup>329</sup> Hanson, *The Kachins*, 165.

<sup>330</sup> Ibid., 167.

<sup>331</sup> Ibid.

<sup>332</sup> Ibid., 171.

<sup>333</sup> Pungga Sinwa Awng (Kutkai Kachin Baptist Church), “DAIDAW JAHTAWNG HTU AI LAM” (The Natal Ceremony), Facebook, August 20, 2016. <https://www.facebook.com/670662716373252/posts/-daidaw-jahtawng-htu-ai-lam-by-pungga-sinwa-awng-shanhpyi-laika-ningchyo-kachin/902131363226385/>.

the priest or an elderly person pronounces the blessing to the health, long life and greatness of the child follows:

This morning's natal food is pleasant and palatable;  
May you live till your hair is gray,  
May you live till your teeth have fallen out,  
Untill you can do nothing but sit and frighten the hawks,  
Untill the dust of the front stable covers your body.<sup>334</sup>

On the fourth day (if a male) or third day (if a female), the village *Dumsa*, “neighbors and friends gather for the ceremony of presenting the newborn child” to the *Gumgun Gumhpai Nats*. A *Dumsa* “places some dried fish and meat, a dried mole or rat, some liquor and matted rice” before the *Gumgun Gumhpai Nats*, and asks “their favor and protection on behalf of the new member of the family.”<sup>335</sup> After that, an elderly man or woman takes the new arrival to the *Janhku Nat* (Sun) for the presentation; starting from the place opposite the family altar, the child is carried past the chief fireplace and then taken back again, saying “go out and see the sun, come and behold the sun,” while going and returning.<sup>336</sup> Sinwa Awng asserts that the heart of *Jahtawng Htu* is *Karai Kasang* and it is to dedicate the name and the life of the new born child to *Karai Kasang*.<sup>337</sup>

*Hkungran Poi* (the Marriage ceremony): To the Kachins, the extended family or household (*htingdaw*) and the clan or major lineage (*amyu*) is of the most important in determining one's relationship. Each individual views Kachin society outside of his own clan as made up of two categories—“those clans and lineages from whom his clan asks

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<sup>334</sup> Ibid., 172.

<sup>335</sup> Ibid., 172-173.

<sup>336</sup> Ibid.

<sup>337</sup> Sinwa Awng, “DAIDAW JAHTAWNG HTU AI LAM” (The Natal Ceremony).

for wives (*mayu*), and those to whom his clan and lineage give wives (*dama*).”<sup>338</sup> The division of those clans into the two categories of *mayu* and *dama* lie at the heart of Kachin kinship structure and social relationships.<sup>339</sup> Marriage is, in Kachin culture, an agreement made by the parents and relatives of each side, the *mayu* and the *dama*, bringing about an alliance of two families and their clans. The *dama* (the family of the man) makes its request through its chosen representatives to the *mayu* (the family of the woman). Several visits are needed to complete the arrangements. The *dama* must give sizable gifts or prizes “*Hpu Ja*” (bride-price)<sup>340</sup> to the *mayu* after considerable bargaining, including cattle, jewelry, gongs and money, with only token of gifts being given to the *dama* in return. This is a foundation for a continuing relationship between the two families, in which the *dama* families are always considered to be subservient to the *mayu*. Just as each family has this relationship through its sons’ wives with a family and its clan, their *mayu*, they have the reverse relationship through their daughters, with other lineages which they term their *dama*.<sup>341</sup>

When a son is to have a wife, the parents call the *Ningwawt*, the diviner and the prospective girl’s belonging such as clothing, yarn, chewing lime, etc., are tested by divination to see whether the girl is suitable for the son. Then the *dama*, the husband’s family sends an emissary with gifts to make a proposal for the girl before her parents. The *mayu*, the girl’s parents with their relative elders inspect the lineage of the proposing family and then make the decision whether to give their daughter. After making the

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<sup>338</sup> Tegenfeldt, *A Century of Growth: The Kachin Baptist Church of Burma*, 24.

<sup>339</sup> Ibid.

<sup>340</sup> In the Kachin custom, the *Hpu Ja*, the price for the girl includes such as buffaloes, a bullock, an elephant tusk, a roll of embroidery, a felt cloth, old gongs, horses, cows, etc., according to the status of the girl’s lineage and the boy’s lineage.

<sup>341</sup> Ibid., 30.

decision, the amount of *Hpu Ja* to be paid by the groom is negotiated, and the wedding date is fixed.<sup>342</sup>

As I have mentioned, the arrangement of the elephant grass, “*Kumba*,” is an important of the Wedding. “*Kumba Shalai Ai*,” passing the elephant grass by the bride to solemnize a marriage, is the main ritual part of the ceremony. On the wedding night, a village bard sings the ancestral story of the bride so that the bride and groom can enjoy a prosperous life. The two spears carried by the bridesmaids are now brought forth; to each is tied securely two divining bamboos and ears of a kind of millet. These “Spears of Blessing” represent the parents of the bride and are placed by the fireplace of the bridegroom’s parents. Then the *Jaiwa* (the high priest) begins a recital which will last all night long. The *Jaiwa* “rehearse in rhythmic language the story of the first bridal pair, and the particular history of the bride, ending with wishing her many children and a long, happy and prosperous life.”<sup>343</sup>

*Makoi Mayang* (the Funeral ceremony): The Kachins believe in life after death, but there are no moral rules for the present life to prepare for the life after death. In regard to the future the belief is simply this: there is a life lived in the ancestral realms, where conditions are about the same as upon the earth. Death is accepted as an inevitable part of the order of things. “Every person, at the moment of death, becomes a “*tsu*” (spirit)<sup>344</sup> and is sent to the ancestral realm called “*Tsu Ga*” (the land of the shades or spirits), or “*Katsan Ga*” (the far away country), or “*Jat Na Ga*” (the land of the perpetual increase, the abode of the departed), and “*Jiwoi Ga*” (the ancestral realms). The spirit

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<sup>342</sup> Hanson, *The Kachins*, 183-184.

<sup>343</sup> Ibid., 189-190.

<sup>344</sup> The *tsu* is different from the *minla* (ghost); the ghost is a kind of an astray body while the *tsu* is looked upon as a half-Nat bound for the ancestral regions.

(*tsu*) must pass the “*Nhpraw Hka*” (the white river) where it washes off all the defilement of earth and precedes the crossroad that leads to the ancestral abodes.<sup>345</sup>

There are two parts of the funeral ceremony, separated by weeks or months, and sometimes even years. The first part is called “*lup makoi ai* or *mang hta kau ai*” (the burial of the dead body). In this stage, the corpse is buried but the spirit still remains in the household. The second part is called “*tsu shabawm dat ai*” (sending away the remaining spirit to the ancestral realm respectively).<sup>346</sup> There is also a special performance of the *Kabung Dum*,<sup>347</sup> the death-dance before the “*tsu shabawm*” (sending away spirit). The *Tsu-Dumsa* has been leading the spirit to the ancestral abodes. The *Tsu-Dumsa* exhorts the spirit to leave its place, “when the Nat comes, and follows the central post up to the house-ridge, and then departs by the front gable and then over grass, bush and trees, hills and mountains, brooks and rivers, the road is shown until the *Nhpraw Hka* (the white river) is reached.”<sup>348</sup> This is the boundary between the now and the hereafter. The *Tsu-Dumsa* conducts the spirit across, changing the appearance and putting on the forehead of a monkey pass the *Jahku Numshe* (the nine cross-roads). This is a priestly role of the *Tsu-Dumsa*—to send away the dead spirit (*tsu*) to the ancestral realm.<sup>349</sup>

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<sup>345</sup> There are no very definite ideas as to the nature of the life in this mysterious realm, but the general impression is that the life on the other side is much like the present on this earth. Hanson, *The Kachins*, 193-194.

<sup>346</sup> Ibid., 195-196.

<sup>347</sup> The Kachins usually performed the “*Kabung*,” a religious dance kept up every evening in the house of a deceased, until the spirit (*tsu*) is sent off to the land of the ancestors. “*Dum*” means to play or to song. Thus, “*Kabung Dum*” means to song the gongs and drums to dance the death-dance. See Hanson, *Dictionary of the Kachin Language*, 244. The death-dance is liberally performed by the attendants every night until dawn from the time of the burial to the day of the final ceremonies. This dance is for the pleasure of the departed that he/she is honored and remembered by representing every moment to the past life actions of the departed. The dancing follows the sound made by beating the three gongs of different sound and tonal power. Up to this present day, in some villages, this *Kabung Dum* is still practiced where all young and old people can join and dance together.

<sup>348</sup> Hanson, *The Kachins*, 207

<sup>349</sup> Ibid. This is just a brief statement of a part of the Funeral ceremony emphasizing the priestly roles of the priesthoods.

#### E. The Nats and Ecological Concern

Nats, for Kachins, are unseen and, therefore, Nats are spirits. They have no body or form. Thus, Nats are to be regarded as “supernatural beings” because of being formless and invisible. Nats are none other than the living, spiritual beings. Nats are born for human beings; they are for the good of human beings. The Nats exist and live within the mountains and forests, rivers, and skies. That means that their immanence is found in nature, separate and yet together with the Kachins. This is why the Kachins did not destroy the forest, cutting down the trees or the mountains, or ruin the rivers, and skies. They only used what they needed and supplied sacrifices and offerings to appease the Nats and ask for blessings.

The belief in the existence of Nats, spiritual beings who are to help guide people to God’s law, has been a part of the life of the Kachin people in Myanmar, and has been deeply embedded in their religio-culture. The missionaries taught Kachin people to believe that the Christian God was the *Karai Kasang*, the Unknown God. The missionaries taught them to pray, to praise, and to worship *Karai Kasang*. Their own belief in Supreme Being, *Karai Kasang* made them believe in the Creator God of the Christian Bible, preached by the missionaries. However, introducing this classical Christian concept of God really made Kachin people turn away from their non-dualistic, non-hierarchical, and non-patriarchal *Karai Kasang*. Thus, it is my aim to reconstruct the Kachin concept of *Karai Kasang* by integrating Whiteheadian metaphysics and philosophy of theology and Nat worship. I learned about the significant connections between *Karai Kasang* and the Whiteheadian God.

The reason for the brief summary of the Kachin creation narrative is to show a

link between *Karai Kasang*, the Nats, and ecological concerns. *Karai Kasang* is uncreated and so there is no relationality in the sense of the Nats birthed from *Karai Kasang*. What seems to be the only commonality is that *Karai Kasang* is the supreme spirit, and the Nats are minor spirits. Yet, the Nats are the spirits who provide blessings and curses to the Kachin people. The Nats seem to possess the power to move humanity. A similar understanding of the concept of Great Spirit and multiple spirits can be seen in Native North American worldviews. John A. Grim in “Native North American Worldviews and Ecology” gives an overview of Native American world views of ecology, stating that the spirits that exist in the mountains and rivers are the grandmothers and uncles who protect individuals.<sup>350</sup>

This concept, for the Kachin people, provides a worldview and ethics for the land in which they live. They do not take advantage of the land, cutting down the trees or the mountains, or leveling them for their resources. They do not destroy the rivers for search of gold. The Kachin people revere the land because it protects them from the dangers of storms and sickness. It is true that the people in the time of Nat worship thought highly of nature and did not spoil the forests. Nevertheless, this concept dwindled when Nat worship was substituted by Christianity. However, many Kachin Christians did not completely depart from their practice of indigenous Nat worship. While this was not seen as syncretism, some elements of Nat worship and culture remained as forces in the society. The Kachin Christians have exploited the ecology by using the names of Jesus Christ and *Karai Kasang*. Zau Nan writes:

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<sup>350</sup> John A. Grim, “Native North American Worldviews and Ecology,” in *Worldviews and Ecology: Religion, Philosophy, and the Environment*, eds. Mary Evelyn Tucker and John A. Grim, *Ecology and Justice Series* (New York: Orbis Books, 1994), 50.

Before the conversion to Christianity, Kachin worshipped Nats who were believed to live in deep forests, jungles, big trees, deep valleys and high mountains. Many deep forests were prohibited from [people entering], as “Hkrit Maling,” “Hkrit” means “afraid of/fear” and “Maling” means “Forest/Jungle”.... Nobody, therefore, went and took anything from “Hkrit Maling” because he was afraid of the keeper of the forest, [the] unseen one, who was really one of the Nats Kachins previously worshipped. By this way, many forests, full of precious natural resources, such as animals, species, bamboo and good soil, were kept from destruction generation by generation and many forests remained as “Hkrit Maling” being decorated by the beauty and dignity of Kachin land, but, when Kachins became Christians, everything [was] done in the name of God and Jesus Christ. Nobody [was] afraid to go to the “Hkrit Maling” and take anything from it, because Kachin Christians [had] been trained not [fear the Nats].<sup>351</sup>

To the same extent, Nat worship can serve as a locus for theology as it can supply the concept of veneration, but not worship, of nature and the whole of creation. Pau Khan has recognized the ecological crisis itself as a challenge to Christian mission to rethink the place of nature in the whole structure of Christian theology.<sup>352</sup> Thus, concerning the study of ecology in the Kachin context, the Kachin Christians have to depart from their traditional reading of the Bible and misunderstanding of nature. They have to be conscious that the whole of nature is watched by *Karai Kasang* through the form of Nats, the Holy Spirit.

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<sup>351</sup> Daniel K. Zau Nan, “Eco-Theology: The Environmental Threats in Kachin state” (Paper presented at the Ecology class, Myanmar Institute of Theology, Yangon, Myanmar, 2003), 4-5. Once a deacon said to Nngai Gam when he arrived at the *Jahku Numshe* (A Nine Cross-roads), the place where nine roads are met and emerged from the same place, “Sir this place, in previous time, was prohibited to come and cut any plants or tree, because a great Nat was ruling here. People, therefore, were afraid to come to this place. But, last two years, I came here and cut all trees down with prayer in the name of Jesus Christ.” Then Nngai Gam replied him: “Do you think that God is the one who cut down trees or the one who plants trees? Do you ever think of it?” This is a personal experience of Rev. Nngai Gam told to Rev. Daniel K. Zau Nan.

<sup>352</sup> Pau Khan En, “Nat Worship: A Paradigm of Doing Contextual Theology for Myanmar,” 354.



## F. The Subjective Immortality of the Nats

In this section, I discuss how a Whiteheadian conception of immortality could help Kachin people understand the subjective immortality of the Nats. Process theology, as developed from Alfred North Whitehead's process philosophy, is a theology of relationality that integrate implications of a thoroughly interdependent universe into how we live and express our faith. Process theology convinces that "to be related to something is to be internally affected by that something, and to effect something else in turn. Relationship is itself a dynamic process."<sup>353</sup> Process God is co-creator of the world, God creates with the world. God creates the world out of chaos with which God works, and from which God bring order—creation—into existence. God creates the world through persuasive power.<sup>354</sup> All of the creations of God have some element of freedom that God works with each element in existence, in every time and place, to offer possibilities for achieving the good. That means we decide what we will become. We all are responsible for dealing with the power of the past (power of the world); the power of the future (the power of God); and the power of the present (our own power) to integrate these influences into who we are becoming in every moment.<sup>355</sup> Unlike the classical notion of evil and sin, process theology asserts that "missing the mark" as the interpretation of moral evil and rejects the claim that moral evil is the reason to have natural evils.<sup>356</sup> In process view, "individual sins are magnified when exercised through our communal identities, creating great evils through such things as oppressive systems of exploitation, wars of aggression, economic systems based upon freed, or systematic decimation of our

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<sup>353</sup> Suchocki, *What is Process Theology?* 5.

<sup>354</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>355</sup> *Ibid.*, 6-7.

<sup>356</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

environment for the sake of profit.”<sup>357</sup> God calls us to eliminate evils from violent ways of imposing our wills on others toward cooperative ways of creating good.<sup>358</sup> Process thought affirms that “process is fundamental,” and it is a way of thinking about change. It holds the fact that “things are in process is subject to change.”<sup>359</sup> Process theology’s view of God is all-loving: God’s love is the foundation of all reality. All things live and move and have their beings through God’s love. God is omniscient: God knows everything there is to know, but God opens the future. God is omnipresent: God is in everything and everywhere. Every creature in every moment is experiencing God as the ground of both order and freedom.<sup>360</sup> Some key elements of process theology are becoming, relationality, freedom, primordial vision, the problem of evil, creativity, immortality, and so on. Here I draw on Coleman’s concept of ancestral immortality and discuss how to apply that to the Nats.

Immortality with reference to Whitehead’s thought is referred to in two parts: objective immortality and subjective immortality. By objective immortality, Whitehead means that, “as each actual occasion brings together its resources of becoming a final satisfaction, it then becomes datum for subsequent actual occasions. The actual occasion having occurred has attained objective immortality.”<sup>361</sup> In *Process and Reality*, Whitehead says:

The consequent nature of God is the fluent world become ‘everlasting’ by its objective immortality in God... But objective immortality within the temporal world does not solve the problem set by the penetration of the

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<sup>357</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>358</sup> Ibid.

<sup>359</sup> Cobb and Griffin, *Process Theology*, 14.

<sup>360</sup> Mesle, *Process Theology*, 8-9.

<sup>361</sup> Forrest Wood, Jr., “Whiteheadian Thought as a Basis for a Philosophy of Religion,” in *Religion Online*, William F. Fore, Senior Editor <https://web.archive.org/web/20180928041733/https://www.religion-online.org/book-chapter/chapter-8-a-whiteheadian-conception-of-immortality-2/> (accessed September 11, 2018).

finer religious intuition. ‘Everlastingness’ has been lost; and ‘everlasting’ is the content of that vision upon which the finer religions are built—the ‘many’ absorbed everlastingly in the final unity.<sup>362</sup>

Thus, we become everlasting by our objective immortality in God. God prehends every actuality in the temporal world. Subsequently, each temporal feeling, transformed into that feeling in God, is everlastingly immediate in God.<sup>363</sup>

John B. Cobb Jr. tends to focus on objective immortality, that is, our survival in God’s memory and in the impact of our lives on the future. He claims, “Whitehead explicitly and forcefully denies that the existence of the soul is any evidence for its survival of bodily death.”<sup>364</sup> According to Bruce Epperly, “in terms of Whitehead’s understanding of objective immortality, each moment of experience perishes in terms of its subjective immediacy and lives forevermore in God’s ever-expanding consequent nature.”<sup>365</sup> In speaking of a Whiteheadian vision of life after death, Cobb notes that Whitehead’s metaphysical system “only argues for the possibility of life after death, not at all for its actuality. There is nothing about the nature of the soul or the cosmos that demands the continued existence of the living person.”<sup>366</sup> Since we have no evidence of subjective survival after death, there is no reason to make it central to theological reflection.<sup>367</sup>

According to Suchocki, Whitehead holds that “the objectivity of the past allows

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<sup>362</sup> Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 347.

<sup>363</sup> Forrest Wood, Jr., “Whiteheadian Thought as a Basis for a Philosophy of Religion.”

<sup>364</sup> John B. Cobb, Jr., *A Christian Natural Theology: Based on the Thought of Alfred North Whitehead*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 30.

<sup>365</sup> Bruce G. Epperly, *Process Theology: A Guide for the Perplexed* (New York: T&T Clark, 2011), 135.

<sup>366</sup> Cobb, Jr., *A Christian Natural Theology*, 35.

<sup>367</sup> Epperly, *Process Theology*, 136-137.

prehension by the becoming preseng and this is objective immortality.”<sup>368</sup> For Suchocki, “subjectivity is superceded by objectivity; this maintains the givenness of the past, with the givenness being requisite for order to be attained by each succeeding actual occasion.”<sup>369</sup> For the occasion, immortality begins with the enjoyment of satisfaction. Suchocki claims that if we cannot render subjective immortality coherent, “subjectivity can claim only the ideal of the satisfaction as the occasion presses toward its actualization; and its attainment is the occasion’s death.”<sup>370</sup> Regarding Suchoki’s idea of subjective immortality, Coleman summarizes:

Marjorie Suchocki develops a concept of subjective immortality using Whitehead’s metaphysics. She argues that in the process of becoming, there is a moment between when we become something new and when we cease being the old person where we can enjoy ourselves... If there are feelings and experiences of self in this intermediate or transitory place, then those feelings and experiences are available to those we influence. The concept of subjective immortality enlarges the scope of how we feel the influence of the past and how God feels and incorporates the world into God’s self... Subjective immortality is significant inasmuch as it is important to most of us that, even while others in the world cannot completely know us, God should be able to know and feel us both in terms of what has happened to us and in terms of how we feel.<sup>371</sup>

Thus, many process thinkers reject “life after death” in the way that Suchocki means it and especially in the way that Coleman means it. Coleman affirms life after death and ancestors. She combines the objective immortality of Whitehead and subjective immortality of Suchocki to articulate the importance of the role of the ancestors, who are actively involved in the contemporary processes of becoming in the African traditional

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<sup>368</sup> Majorie Hewitt Suchocki, *The End of Evil: Process Eschatology in Historical Context* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2005), 85.

<sup>369</sup> Ibid.

<sup>370</sup> Ibid.

<sup>371</sup> Coleman, *Creating Women’s Theology*, 220-221.

religions.<sup>372</sup> For her, “Whitehead discusses ways that the events of the past are alive within God and the world. Suchocki expands upon Whitehead’s philosophy to talk about the ways that God can share in the feelings of our experiences.”<sup>373</sup> Coleman explores the ideas of subjective immortality and the continual existence of the ancestors. She stresses, “the process of rememory is one approach to keeping the past alive in the present and the future, and a second approach to learning from the past focuses on the role that the ancestors play in our lives.”<sup>374</sup> Coleman’s concept of “the ancestral immortality,” the life after death and the existence of the ancestors, helps Kachin people understand the subjective immortality of the *Gumgun Gumhpai* Nats, which allows them to continue to live and experience themselves in *Karai Kasang*. The ancestors continue in life because they are represented to fulfill *Karai Kasang*’s vision for the world.<sup>375</sup>

I understood this concept of the continual existence of the past ancestors in African traditional religions more clearly when I watched the memorial service of Nelson Mandela, the former president of the South Africa, the anti-apartheid hero, and the icon of human rights, on December 10, 2013. There was a lot of rain especially at the memorial service, which was held at FNB Stadium in Soweto, Johannesburg. People expressed that “rain is a sign of blessing, rain is life” in African traditions and “it is a soul of Nelson Mandela,” who gives blessings and continues to take care of the people of South Africa.<sup>376</sup> The late Nelson Mandela continues to live as the role of the ancestor in the lives of the South Africans. With this in mind, I incorporate Coleman’s ideas of

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<sup>372</sup> Coleman, *Making a Way Out of No Way*, 107.

<sup>373</sup> Ibid., 102.

<sup>374</sup> Ibid., 101.

<sup>375</sup> Ibid., 116-117.

<sup>376</sup> SABC Digital News, “The Public Will Not Be Allowed Inside Mandela’s Homestead on Sunday,” YouTube Video, 6:27, December 11, 2013, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZydQLLCSC6g>.

ancestors as part of God and experience as they participate in God in the Kachin concept of Nats. Coleman's description of the ancestors as spiritual beings is similar to the Kachin concept of Nats. Like "spirit possession" in African traditional religions, the *Gumgun Gumhpai Nat* in the Kachin Nat worship, have "special knowledge that can be accessed by the living through rituals of remembrance, rites of divination, and spirit possession."<sup>377</sup> Coleman's concept of "the ancestral immortality" that life after death and the existence of the ancestors fits well with the Kachin concept of *Gumgun Gumhpai Nats*.<sup>378</sup>

Coleman mentions that "Whitehead's concept of immortality explains that what has died to the world are indeed accessible to the present. What has died to the world is present and alive in God and the world, but only objectively."<sup>379</sup> For Coleman, "the living must also be able to access the experience of the ancestors and this necessitates a kind of subjective immortality."<sup>380</sup> Suchocki also develops a concept of subjective immortality and she argues that "in the process of becoming, there is a moment between when we become something new and when we cease being the old person where we can enjoy ourselves."<sup>381</sup> This could help Kachin people understand a deeper meaning of the continual existence of *Gumgun Gumhpai Nats*.

Coleman further states that "the enjoyment of experience or ourselves continues when we die to the world and continue in God. Our spirits, our souls, our ancestors retain the experience within God"<sup>382</sup> and therefore "people's spirit can continue to live on even

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<sup>377</sup> Coleman, *Making a Way Out of No Way*, 114.

<sup>378</sup> Ibid., 115.

<sup>379</sup> Ibid., 116.

<sup>380</sup> Ibid.

<sup>381</sup> Ibid.

<sup>382</sup> Ibid.

though their bodies die.”<sup>383</sup> In the Kachin concept of Nat worship, the *tsu* of the dead people continue to live in the ancestral realm. There is life after death for every person. For Coleman, within God the ancestors have access to what is happening in the world because God is taking in the events of the world into Godself. Here, there is a genuine life after death—life in God.<sup>384</sup> Coleman put this in a Christian context, we might say that although Jesus is no longer here on earth, Jesus is in a heavenly realm, where Jesus still knows what is happening in the world. Here Jesus feels all the same aspects that influence God. As Jesus’ spirit is related to God’s overall vision and incorporated into God’s call for the world, the Holy Spirit has knowledge and power that are divine. Coleman uses the Gospel of John 16:7, “Nevertheless I tell you the truth; it is to your advantages that I go away, for I do not go away, the Comforter will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you,” to explain the Holy Spirit as an ancestor spirit of Jesus.<sup>385</sup>

This is also true of Nats in the Kachin context. Coleman’s application of subjective immortality could help Kachin people understand the subjective immortality of Nats as the Nats continue to live and experience themselves in *Karai Kasang*. Nats are to be a part of *Karai Kasang*. The Nats continue in life because they are represented to fulfill the God’s vision for the world. Like the ancestors in African traditional religions, the Nats “aims at the ideals of truth, beauty, art, adventure, peace, and justice.”<sup>386</sup> Nats are, therefore, emblematic of subjective immortality and also of ancestral immortality. By subjective immortality, the Nats are active inside *Karai Kasang*. Ancestral immortality helps Kachin people understand how the Nats continue to interact with present day

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<sup>383</sup> Ibid., 118.

<sup>384</sup> Ibid., 116.

<sup>385</sup> Ibid., 121.

<sup>386</sup> Ibid., 120.

Kachin.

Coleman's idea of subjective immortality also matches Epperly's complementary of objective immortality and subjective immortality. Epperly posits, "taken as complementary to one another, both the objective immortality and subjective immortality affirm the importance of this lifetime, inspire acts of social justice, and promise hope for the future."<sup>387</sup> Accordingly, for the Kachins, Nats are born for human beings; they are for the good of human beings. The persuasive power of Nats are the guiding hope for the people toward the vision of creative transformation.

Regarding the *Matse Nat ni* (the evil Nats), the Kachin conceive of evil Nats is a way to explain loss and tragedy. God is not good in the classical Christian sense since there are places, where Whitehead indicates that God is aiming for harmony and intensity of experience and that might not be experienced "good," just complex and interesting.<sup>388</sup> For Whitehead, "evil is part of the system, the way in which the world operates."<sup>389</sup> He stresses that "the fact of the instability of evil is the moral order in the world. Evil, triumphant in its enjoyment, is so far good in itself; but beyond itself it is evil in its character of a destructive agent among things greater than self."<sup>390</sup> Whitehead describes "evil as suffering, loss, and the feeling that accompanies overwhelming loss. Evil can overcome through freedom granted to the world's inhabitants, the activity of God, and the relationality of the system."<sup>391</sup> Taking this into the account of Kachin Nat worship, the *Matse Nats* are loss and that, therefore, are eliminated by the way the Kachin people

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<sup>387</sup> Epperly, *Process Theology*, 144.

<sup>388</sup> Coleman, *Creating Women's Theology*, 18.

<sup>389</sup> Coleman, *Making a Way Out of No Way*, 52.

<sup>390</sup> Whitehead, *Religion in the Making*, 83.

<sup>391</sup> Coleman, *Making a Way Out of No Way*, 52.



remember the past, the way that *Karai Kasang*'s remembers the Kachin people and searches for the best in the Kachin people, and through the vision for the common good that the Kachin people can experience in *Karai Kasang*'s calling.<sup>392</sup> Instead of coercive power to eliminate the *Matse Nats*, *Karai Kasang* attempts through persuasion to move all *Matse Nats* toward *Karai Kasang*'s goals. The goals of *Karai Kasang* offer the Kachin people the opportunity to overcome the *Matse Nats*. Then, once again the *Matsaw Ningtsa Nats* and the *Gumgun Gumhpai Nats* will return, the spiritual laws will return to their place, and the *Matse Nats* of the world will finally subside.

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<sup>392</sup> Ibid., 53.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### POSTCOLONIAL PERSPECTIVE ON KACHIN WOMEN AND ECOLOGY

The British colonizers and American missionaries considered the Kachin people heathens, savages, and infidels. This discriminatory attitude was also internalized by the dominant Bamar people, who thought of themselves as more civilized and superior to the Kachin people. The Nat worship and beliefs of the Kachin people were suppressed and made invisible by colonizers as well as the colonized Bamar people. The Kachin people of Myanmar have been fighting against the government since 1961. One of the major purposes of this revolution has been for religious freedom and ethnic minority rights. Thus, the Kachin Independent Army (KIA), the armed wing of the Kachin Independent Organization (KIO), and the *Tatmadaw*<sup>393</sup> (the Burmese Army) have been fighting each other for many decades. Religious violence and ethnic cleansing have also occurred as well. Most KIA soldiers have been predominantly Christian Baptists and Roman Catholics, and majority of Burmese soldiers have been Buddhists. Many people observed that this civil war was initially caused by religious oppression and racism. I discuss how postcolonialism has shaped the Kachin people's understanding of religion and race conflict in light of the present civil war between the KIA and the *Tatmadaw* and its impact on women and ecology. I also suggest how postcolonial liberation theology could help decolonize the Bamarism and build Kachin postcolonial feminist theology to overcome the coloniality of gender.

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<sup>393</sup> *Tatmadaw* is the Burmese word for Burmese government army. For the detailed information about the human rights abuses in today's Kachin land, see Human Rights Watch, "*Untold Miseries*": *Wartime Abuses and Forced Displacement in the Kachin land* (USA: Human Rights Watch, 2012).

## A. A Brief Historical Background of Kachin Independent Organization (KIO) and Kachin Independent Army (KIA)

The Kachin people had a separate country before British rule, but it then became a part of Myanmar after their regime. In the earlier period, Kachin people lived under the rule of their own chiefs. The Kachins call them “*Duwas*.”<sup>394</sup> The history passed down orally reveals that the *Duwas* were conscious about their people, guided them, and helped them. *Duwas* were great leaders among the Kachin People. Duwa Wabaw Zau Rip, one of the Kachin political leaders, says, “the Kachin people had never been under the domination and subjugation of any people or nation. Living as a free people under their own chieftain rulership, they had always defended and protected their territorial integrity of their homeland.”<sup>395</sup> Duwa Wabaw Zau Rip also writes, “after 1926 the Kachin homeland was under British rule. At the end of World War II, Burma sought independence from Great Britain, and Kachin leaders took solemn responsibility in partaking in this historic movement.”<sup>396</sup> In 1946, General Aung San arrived in the Kachin land to discuss the united effort to achieve independence from Great Britain.<sup>397</sup> Then, the Kachin leaders were persuaded only on the condition that “the Kachins would be given the same rights of equality with the majority Bamar and that the exercise of self-determination be granted to the Kachins in their internal affairs.”<sup>398</sup>

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<sup>394</sup> For more information about the Kachin administration, see E.R. Leach, *Political Systems of Highland Burma: A Study of Kachin Social Structure* (Oxford: BERG, 2004).

<sup>395</sup> Duwa Wabaw Zau Rip, “Panglung Ga Shaka Laika Byin Wa Ai Lam” (The Panglong Agreement),” In Kachin Net, <https://web.archive.org/web/20181020005830/http://www.kachinnet.net/kachin-alam/labau/43-pang-lung-ga-shaka-laika-byin-wa-ai-lam.html/> and WP Ginra, “Pang Lung Ga Shaka Laika Byin wa ai lam” (The Panglong Agreement) <http://laikadum.blogspot.com/2010/10/pang-lung-ga-shaka-laika-byin-wa-ai-lam.html> (accessed September 26, 2018).

<sup>396</sup> Ibid.

<sup>397</sup> General Aung San was the father of Nobel Peace Laureate Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, the pro-democracy leader of Myanmar.

<sup>398</sup> Duwa Wabaw Zau Rip, “*Panglung Ga Shaka Laika Byin Wa Ai Lam* (The Panglong Agreement).”

On February 12, 1947, the eight Kachin leaders, including many leaders from the other ethnic groups, like Shan and Chin, met with the Burmese delegation led by General Aung San at Panglong, Shan State, to sign the Panglong Agreement.<sup>399</sup> This Panglong Agreement carries a declarative central issue that states, “within the Union of Burma there shall be a Kachin land with demarcation of boundaries that define its entity,” which is to be submitted to the Constituent Assembly for recognition.<sup>400</sup> However, after the assassination of General Aung San on July 19, 1947, “the Panglong Agreement has been an unfulfilled promise and unrealized dream.”<sup>401</sup> Jaiwa claims, “many ethnic resistance groups, including KIA, invoke the Panglong Agreement and demand the successive governments to fulfill the promise of Panglong.”<sup>402</sup>

The Kachin people have never desired to live under any governing body. They have always valued their liberty in the fulfillment of their own destiny and self-determination. Due this background, Lahtaw Zau Seng and his brothers, Lahtaw Zau Tu and Lahtaw Zau Dan, along with hundreds of Kachin youth in the northern Shan State, founded the KIO and its armed wing, KIA, on February 5, 1961.<sup>403</sup> The Kachin people have been living with armed conflict against the *Tatmadaw* in response to what many have seen as growing subjugation by the Burmese political establishment. Thus, the Kachin land has been a fierce battleground since the founding of the KIO/KIA in 1961.<sup>404</sup>

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<sup>399</sup> Ibid. *Pyitaung-suu Myanmar Naing Ngan Daw*, meaning, “the Union of Myanmar,” was birthed by the Panglong agreement.

<sup>400</sup> Ibid.

<sup>401</sup> Jaiwa, “The Casualties of Panglong,” in the Kachinland News, <http://kachinlandnews.com/?p=19537> (accessed September 26, 2018).

<sup>402</sup> Ibid.

<sup>403</sup> Marip H. Naw Awn, “K.I.A (Kachin Independent Army) Hpaw Mat Wa Ai Lam (The History of Kachin Independent Army),” in Kachin Net, <http://www.kachinnet.net/kachin-alam/labau/54-kia-kachin-independence-army-hpaw-mat-wa-ai-lam.html> (accessed September 26, 2018).

<sup>404</sup> Human Rights Watch, *Untold Miseries: Wartime Abuses and Forced Displacement in the Kachin land* (USA: Human Rights Watch, 2012), 23.

## 1. The Ongoing War between KIA and the *Tatmadaw* and Its Effects on Women

After long negotiations, a ceasefire agreement was signed in February 1994 between the KIO and the Burmese government. Rev. Dr. Saboi Jum, then the General Secretary of the Kachin Baptist Convention, worked as the peace mediator and led the ceasefire agreement between the KIO and the Burmese government. In reality, the ceasefire agreement stopped the fighting, but it was not a peace agreement. It could not bring an end to human rights abuses by the *Tatmadaw* in the Kachin land.<sup>405</sup> According to Human Rights Watch, “many Kachin villagers described painful histories of abusive forced labor, torture, killings, rape, property destruction, land confiscation, and other abuses by the Burmese Army before and after the 1994 ceasefire.”<sup>406</sup> Human Rights Watch further reports:

The Kachins also spoke of past instances of religious repression, which have contributed to collective fears of persecution and widespread feelings of ethnic and religious discrimination among displaced Kachin communities. Several civilians told Human Rights Watch how their villages were burned to the ground by the Burmese army in the 1970s, 1980s, and early 1990s.<sup>407</sup>

The civil war between the KIA and the *Tatmadaw* started again in June 9, 2011 ending after 17 years of a ceasefire agreement. The *Tatmadaw* has begun a major military offensive in the Kachin land.<sup>408</sup> The *Tatmadaw* has systematically exploited and dehumanized the people of Kachin. As Human Rights Watch reports, the *Tatmadaw* has been responsible for numerous human rights violations since the war resumed.<sup>409</sup> “There

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<sup>405</sup> Also see Global Witness, *A Conflict of Interests: The Uncertain Future of Burma's Forests* (London: Global Witness Ltd, 2003), 92-93.

<sup>406</sup> Human Rights Watch, *Untold Miseries*, 25.

<sup>407</sup> Ibid.

<sup>408</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>409</sup> Fighting between KIA and the *Tatmadaw* is still going on. Many of my relatives are in the refugee camps in Laiza, China border. While reporting at the KIA frontline post, Kawngwai, near Loiye, Banmaw, on January 4, 2012, my beloved cousin, Pastor Lahpai Naw Ming, was shot and seriously injured

are credible allegations of laws-of-war violations—including deliberate or indiscriminate attacks on civilians, extrajudicial killings, rape and other sexual violence, torture, unlawful use of porters, use of child soldiers, and so on.”<sup>410</sup> KWAT reports that, during this seven years of civil war in the Kachin region between June 9, 2011 and April 30, 2018, over 3,800 battles were fought between the Kachin Independence Army and the Burma Army, averaging 46 battles per month. Over 120,000 people, more than half of them being women and children, have been displaced and currently reside in Internally Displaced Persons camps.<sup>411</sup>

According to the recent reports of Nick Cumming-Bruce, the New York Times reporter, The United Nations Human Rights Council stepped up pressure to punish Myanmar’s military commanders for a brutal campaign and forced some 750,000 Rohingya Muslims to flee to Bangladesh, and crimes against humanity in connection with actions against other ethnic minorities.<sup>412</sup> Amnesty International has documented extensively the atrocities of the *Tatmadaw*, including murder, rape, torture, forced starvation and forced deportation as well as other serious human rights violations against

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by the heavy artillery used by the Burmese military. He was paralyzed till he passed away on September 23, 2016 in Mai Ja Yang, China border. He was awarded the third *Pyitu Gon Yee*, the Citizen of Burma Award, on May 27, 2012 for his service to his people.

<sup>410</sup> Human Rights Watch, *Untold Miseries*, 84. For more detailed information about the latest human right abuses in the Kachin land, see KWAT (Kachin Women’s Association Thailand), “Ongoing Impunity: Continued Burma Army Atrocities against the Kachin people.” [http://burmacampaign.org.uk/media/Ongoing\\_Impunity-2.pdf](http://burmacampaign.org.uk/media/Ongoing_Impunity-2.pdf). (accessed September 26, 2018).

<sup>411</sup> KWAT, “Enough is enough! World must act to end Burma Army’s devastating war on Kachin,” 7 years IDPs. June 9, 2018. <https://kachinwomen.com/enough-is-enough-world-must-act-to-end-burma-armys-devastating-war-on-kachin/> (accessed September 26, 2018).

<sup>412</sup> Nick Cumming-Bruce, “Human Rights Council Ratchets Up Pressure on Myanmar,” *New York Times*, September 27, 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/27/world/asia/myanmar-un-human-rights.html> (accessed September 28, 2018).

the Rohingya and war crimes against ethnic minorities in Kachin and northern Shan States, where violations are still ongoing.<sup>413</sup>

Anna May Say Pa is right when she claims that “prostitution, rape, forcing women to be porters to carry army supplies and becoming human mine shields are the barbaric acts performed against women in times of war.”<sup>414</sup> Observing of the present ongoing war between the KIA and the *Tatamadaw*, Kachin women have been part of the struggle for independence against the Bamar-colonial powers. The majority of Kachin women have faced “the suffering and pain of war, ethnic and religious conflicts and repressive and murderous onslaught of state sanctioned violence.”<sup>415</sup> The brutal rape and killing of the two Kachin female volunteer teachers of the Kachin Baptist Convention is just one of many examples of how the *Tatamadaw* is still using rape as a weapon of war. Burma Campaign UK reports that “two female Kachin teachers, Maran Lu Ra (20 years old) and Tangbau Hkawn Nan Tsin (21 years old) from the Kachin Baptist Convention, were brutally raped and killed by the Burmese Army overnight on January 19, 2015. The attack took place in Kaunghka village, Northern Shan State.”<sup>416</sup> There were 37 rape cases in the first two months of the conflict in which 13 of the victims were allegedly killed. In addition, women were being held as “sex slaves” by the Burmese Army.<sup>417</sup>

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<sup>413</sup> Amnesty International, “UN: Major step towards accountability for atrocity crimes in Myanmar,” <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2018/09/un-amnesty-reaction-to-hrc-resolution-on-myanmar/> (accessed September 28, 2018).

<sup>414</sup> Anna May Say Pa, “Militarism and Violence Against Women: A Study of Judges 19-21,” *RAYS: MIT Journal of Theology* vol. 2 (2001): 7.

<sup>415</sup> Say Pa, “Birthing an Aisan Feminist Theology in the Face of the Dragon,” 15.

<sup>416</sup> Burma Campaign UK, “Two Kachin Teachers Brutally Raped and Killed by Burmese Army,” January 20, 2015. <http://burmacampaign.org.uk/two-kachin-teachers-brutally-raped-and-killed-by-burmese-army/> (accessed September 26, 2018).

<sup>417</sup> KWAT, “Burma’s Covered Up War: Atrocities Against the Kachin People,” August 14, 2016. <https://kachinwomen.com/burmas-covered-up-war-atrocities-against-the-kachin-people/> (accessed September 26, 2018).

KWAT states that they have assisted about one hundred women, who were trafficked to China and disappeared. Without knowing Chinese, and without legal papers, trafficked women face huge obstacles in being able to return home. Most of the trafficked women came from the conflict-affected areas of northern Burma, where the Burma Army resumed offensives against the Kachin in 2011, committing systematic war crimes, including mass destruction of villages, killing, torture and rape of civilians.<sup>418</sup> Nora Pistor, a reporter, mentions that “most research participants shared experiences of cases of sexual violence that were committed by uniformed soldiers. Rape of women of all ages, from young girls to women of over 70 years, was the most frequently mentioned form of violence against women, including gang rapes. Some of these cases resulted in the death of the victims.”<sup>419</sup>

Living in the IDP Camps does not improve the situation of Kachin women any better. The “IDP status” deprives Kachin women of living a life with dignity and self-sufficiency. Living in the IDP Camps for several years has steadily increased feelings of hopelessness, sorrow about their past experiences, deep sadness, trauma, and feelings of depression among many women. Many stories of internally displaced women center around the loss of their land, property and various belongings that they had previously. Many women reported giving birth while they were hiding in the jungle without any medical support or midwifery services. Consequently, many women lost their babies during delivery or miscarried their babies in the jungle. They have also experienced

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<sup>418</sup> KWAT, “Myanmar: Human Trafficking on China border can only be Addressed by Ending Burma Army Offensives and War Crimes,” a Statement on Myanmar’s Anti-trafficking in Persons Day September 13, 2018. <https://kachinwomen.com/myanmar-human-trafficking-on-china-border-can-only-be-addressed-by-ending-burma-army-offensives-and-war-crimes/> (accessed September 26, 2018).

<sup>419</sup> Nora Pistor, “Life on Hold: Experiences of Women Displaced by Conflict in Kachin state, Myanmar,” June 2017. <https://www.trocaire.org/sites/default/files/resources/policy/life-on-hold-trocaire-oxfam-2017.pdf>



domestic violence in various forms, particularly physical violence between couples, beatings by husbands, rape by close family members, as well as many other forms of violence. Given the difficult living situations in the IDP camps, “social problems” were continuing to arise, including prostitution of young girls.<sup>420</sup>

## 2. Bamar Colonialism: Evaluating the War between the KIA and the *Tatmadaw*

In the original Exodus narrative, there are many provocative themes, such as “enslavement, liberation, faith, doubt, the longing for the “comforts of bondage,” the creation of a polity, political leadership, principles of social and economic justice, holy wars, and many others.”<sup>421</sup> The Israelites were enslaved and oppressed in the foreign land, Egypt, but, unlike the Israelites in the Exodus story, the Kachin people are already in the Promised Land, but unfortunately, they are enslaved in their own Promised Land. Most Kachin people have experienced religious oppression and racism by the Burmese government for more than half a century. There is no freedom of worship in the Kachin land. Thus, in his historic visit to Myanmar, President Barack Obama encouraged the government of Myanmar to give freedom to worship and to pursue peace and national reconciliation where conflicts still linger, including in the Kachin land.<sup>422</sup>

Looking at the present war between the KIA and the *Tatmadaw*, many Kachin Christians believe that it is caused by religious oppression and racism. The KIA has

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<sup>420</sup> Ibid.

<sup>421</sup> David S. Gutterman, *Prophetic Politics: Christian Social Movements and American Democracy* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2005), 10.

<sup>422</sup> Office of the Press Secretary, the White House, “Remarks by President Obama at University of Yangon,” for immediate release on November 19, 2012. <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2012/11/19/remarks-president-obama-university-yangon> (accessed September 26, 2018). Also watch The Omaha White House, “President Obama Speaks at University of Yangon,” YouTube Video, 29:58, November 19, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JD3d-IzaM0M>.

fought against the Burmese government because U Nu forced the establishment of Buddhism as the state religion and oppressed the other minority religions, particularly Christianity. Most Kachin pastors have preached how to defeat the evil *Tatmadaw* from the liberation perspective based on the Exodus story. Most Kachin people see the present Burmese government as the stubborn Pharaoh of Egypt in the Exodus narrative. To liberate from the oppressions of the Burmese Pharaoh government, many pastors are taking the roles of *Wunpawng Mawshe* in this liberative movement. The word “*Wunpawng Mawshe*” is the name for Moses in Kachin and it means Kachin Moses. Moses was the liberator for the Israelites in the Exodus narrative whereas *Wunpawng Mawshe* represents the Kachin pastors who are leading the roles of the liberator or activist for the liberation of Kachin people in Myanmar. The KIA soldiers and the Kachin people think that believing in God faithfully can win victory over the enemies. All the KIA soldiers and the Kachin people believe that God is always together with them in their fighting against the *Tatmadaw*. They believe that they are fighting for God, for justice and equality, because Burmese soldiers are Buddhists, and they are the oppressors. Thus, Gutterman is right in today’s Kachin context when he says, “Religion can motivate and empower citizens to engage in the effort to change the world—and provide support in the face of the sacrifices that such changes really require.”<sup>423</sup>

The Burmese government also knows that the KIA/KIO is based on the Kachin Christian community, and the main supporters for KIA/KIO are the pastors and the believers. Thus, the *Tatmadaw*, according to the reports and eyewitnesses, burned down

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<sup>423</sup> Gutterman, *Prophetic Politics*, 19.

many church buildings, and many pastors were arrested and tortured.<sup>424</sup> Concerning the present war between the KIA and the *Tatmadaw*, Trent Franks, the Arizona Congressman and co-chairman of the International Religious Freedom Caucus, says, “The atrocities committed against the Kachins by the Burma Army may amount to war crimes or crimes against humanity.”<sup>425</sup> No doubt, thousands of soldiers from both sides were killed, and thousands of soldiers were also injured. Thousands of houses, churches, villages, and cities in the Kachin land have been destroyed.

Looking from the postcolonial perspective, I came to realize that the present war between the KIA and the *Tatmadaw* is caused by religion and racism along with political, social, and economic reasons. When I trace back to the beginning of the KIA/KIO, it is clearly seen that religious oppression is not the only reason to form KIA/KIO. According to Jaiwa, there are two reasons why KIA/KIO was founded to fight against the Burmese government. Firstly, “it is because of the failed historic Panglong agreement masterminded by the General Aung San. The promise of the union of equals ‘*Kachin Da Kyat, Bamar Da Kyat*’ (the Kachins are entitled one kyat when the Bamars entitled to one kyat), has never been recognized.”<sup>426</sup> Instead, the Panglong agreement was abused and used by the majority Bamars to promote unequal treatment toward ethnic minorities that has led to unequal developments. Secondly, “the Burmese government has historically treated the Kachins and their land as a colony that must be subdued and exploited.”<sup>427</sup>

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<sup>424</sup> For more about crimes in the present war in the Kachin land, see Kachinland News <http://kachinlandnews.com> and Partners Relief & Development, “*Crimes in Northern Burma: Results from Fact-finding Mission to Kachin land*,” November 2011.

<sup>425</sup> Michael Jala, “US Congressman: Army Atrocities in the Kachin land Could be War Crimes,” in Kachin News Group (KNG), <http://www.kachinnews.com/news/2439-us-congressman-army-atrocities-in-kachin-state-could-be-war-crimes.html> (accessed September 26, 2018).

<sup>426</sup> Jaiwa, “The Root, the Cause of the Kachin Situation,” in the Kachinland News, <http://kachinlandnews.com/?p=21965> (accessed September 26, 2018).

<sup>427</sup> Ibid.

Simultaneously to promote such a colonial enterprise, “Burmese colonizing projects entail systematic creation of obstacles to deter intellectual progress of the Kachin people by marginalizing their cultural and religious traditions, and well-planned racial project to enhance divisions among the Kachins while promoting systemic ideology of *Maha Bamar* (superior Bamar) in the population.”<sup>428</sup>

Moreover, according the official statement of the KIOCC (Kachin Independent Organization Central Committee), it was also because of the religious oppression by the U Nu government. U Nu, the first prime minister of Burma (1948-1962) tried to make Buddhism the state religion and suppressed and discriminated against the other minority religions, including Christianity. On 29 August 1961, Parliament passed the State Religion Promotion Act of 1961, initiated by U Nu himself. This act made Buddhism the official state religion of the country. Since Kachin people are Christians, the KIA/KIO began to fight against the government for religious freedom and ethnic minority rights.<sup>429</sup>

According to interview with the KIO Officer, “the Burmese military government said that the main artery of the KIO/KIA is the Hpakant region. That is why that main artery had to be destroyed. They do not fight physically with us; they do it behind our backs.”<sup>430</sup> Since the late 1960s, the KIO’s economy was based on the control of jade rich areas, jade mining and the marketing of jade. Kachin jade merchants also became key benefactors of the KIA, but by the time of the ceasefire, the KIA revenue from jade had

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<sup>428</sup> Ibid.

<sup>429</sup> KIOCC, “Wunpawng Amyu Sha ni a Amu Sha Mung Masa Labau Kadun 6” (The Political History of the Kachin people), in Kachin Net. <http://www.kachinnet.net/kachin-alam/labau/37-wunpawng-amyu-sha-ni-a-amyu-sha-mung-masa-labau-kadun-daw-6.html> (accessed September 26, 2018).

<sup>430</sup> Global Witness, *A Conflict of Interests*, 93.

fallen significantly. By 1997 the KIA had been squeezed out. The KIA lost its main source of income, and the *Tatmadaw* substantially increased its revenue base.<sup>431</sup>

By observing the present war between the KIA and *Tatmadaw*, the *Tatmadaw* is engaged in violence for the purposes of re-colonizing the economy and politics in the Kachin land. KIA/KIO is fighting against the offensive Burmese soldiers in the name of God. Why is *Tatmadaw* killing thousands of Kachin people in the name of religion? Since most KIA soldiers are Baptists and most Burmese soldiers are Buddhists, this war between the KIA and *Tatmadaw* should also be explained as fighting between Buddhism and Christianity. Using the name of God to kill enemies does not mean that only religion causes violence, however, religion and racism are used as tools for the benefit of economic, social, and political reasons.

#### B. Response to Colonialism from a Kachin Liberation Theological Perspective

In the quest for the liberation theology of Kachin Christianity, in this section, I draw on various liberation theologies and postcolonial thinkers. For the Kachin people, despite considering American missionaries as colonizers, the American culture remains the privileged meeting ground for all the cultural aspects of life. The arrival of American Christianity severely affected not only the Kachin people's perception of the world, but also brought a lot of changes to all aspects of lives of the entire creation. Kwok claims, "theological training in Asia at the time continued the process of colonizing Asian minds, even long after the colonizers had packed up and gone home."<sup>432</sup> R.S. Sugirtharajah also describes that "the effects of colonialism on a colonized person go through two

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<sup>431</sup> Ibid.

<sup>432</sup> Pui-lan. *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology*, 41.

conflicting processes.”<sup>433</sup> In the first stage, the colonized person will imitate the colonizer; and in the second stage, he or she will try to recover his or her “indigenous history and retrieve native characteristics. Like the prodigal son, after riotous living among the academic fleshpots of the West and dabbling in fashionable theories, and having our academic purity defiled, we decided to become natives again.”<sup>434</sup> Similarly, the colonality is still going on in the minds of the Kachin people even after the missionaries and the British colonization were gone. Walter D. Mignolo uses the word “colonialism” to refer to colonial situations enforced by the presence of a colonial administration such as the period of classical colonialism. “Coloniality” is to address “colonial situations” in the present period in which colonial administrations have been eradicated from the capitalist world-system.<sup>435</sup> Nelson Maldonado-Torres states,

Coloniality is different from colonialism. Colonialism denotes a political and economic relation in which the sovereignty of a nation or a people rests on the power of another nation, which makes such nation an empire. Coloniality, instead, refers to long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism, but that define culture, labor, intersubjective relations, and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administrations. Thus, coloniality survives colonialism.<sup>436</sup>

The tasks of Kachin Christians in Myanmar in this postcolonial period, should be to resist and transform the imperialism of Americanization and the colonial image of Christianity (colonial Christ) into an indigenous image of life and action. As Frantz

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<sup>433</sup> R. S. Sugirtharajah, *Asian Biblical Hermeneutics and Postcolonialism: Contesting the Interpretations* (England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 129.

<sup>434</sup> Ibid, 129-130.

<sup>435</sup> Walter D. Mignolo and Arturo Escobar, eds., *Globalization and the Decolonial Option* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 74.

<sup>436</sup> Nelson Maldonado-Torres, “On the Coloniality of Being: Contributions to the Development of a Concept,” *Cultural Studies* vol. 21, nos. 2-3 (March/May 2007): 243.

Fanon reminds us in his, *The Wretched of the Earth*,<sup>437</sup> it would be better for the Kachin people to be natives at the uttermost depths of our wretchedness than to be like their former masters.

I resonate with the American Indian Liberation theologian George E. “Tink” Tinker’s arguments that the colonized are forced to adapt to “the colonizer’s language, social structures, economic structures, and political structures.” The church is also one of the colonizer’s main instruments to enforce the colonizing arrangements. For example, the colonizers forced the Indians to believe the western notion of God as “the male hierarchy.” The maleness of God is doctrine and not metaphor.<sup>438</sup> This is totally contrary to the experiences of American Indians. For them, the Sacred or Other or god is “a bi-gender, reciprocal duality of male and female, represented by Sky and Earth, the two great cosmic fructifying powers.”<sup>439</sup>

This is also true for the Kachin people of Myanmar. The situation of the Kachin people is similar to the condition of American Indians. The American missionaries colonized the Kachin people religiously and culturally whereas the British and Burmese colonized them economically and politically. For example, as in the case of the maleness of God imposed on American Indians, the missionaries also colonized the indigenous concept of the Kachin people. The Kachin God, *Karai Kasang*, is not a male and, they never address *Karai Kasang* as “*Wa*.” The Kachins were taught by the American missionaries to call *Karai Kasang* as “*Wa Karai Kasang*.” Consequently, only men

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<sup>437</sup> Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2004).

<sup>438</sup> George E. “Tink” Tinker. *American Indian Liberation: A Theology of Sovereignty* (New York: Orbis Books, 2008), 25-26.

<sup>439</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

become the decision makers, power holders, heads of household to include women and other family members, pastors of the church, and leaders of the community that represents God “himself.” Women must be “silent” in the home and everywhere else. Whether one considers the bi-gender God of American Indians or beyond the gender God of Kachin people, both cultures have greater gender balance and egalitarian concepts of God. Of course, I totally agree with Tinker that indigenous spirituality could help a more sustainable eco-friendly lifestyle than the European civilizing Christian mission.

Economically speaking, the Burmese government wants to control the economy of Kachin land, in particular Hpakant jade mines; similarly, the KIA/KIO does not want to give up Hpakant jade mines either. That is one of the main reasons that the KIA and *Tatmadaw* have been killing each other for more than half a century. Kwok is right when she asserts, “colonization has always involved the exploitation of natural resources, and green imperialism seeks to control and privatize basic necessities of life as well as to monopolize life forms.”<sup>440</sup> She further claims that “colonization means not only the domination of people, but also the exploitation of natural resources for the development and benefit of the colonizers...deforestation, pollution, environmental racism, and other ecological disasters that have wreaked havoc on the livelihood of poor women.”<sup>441</sup> If Kachin land were not rich in natural resources and mineral resources, the Burmese government would never have tried to control over Kachin land. If the Kachin land did not have any valuable resources, the KIA/KIO also would not need to defend against the offensive war by the *Tatmadaw*.

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<sup>440</sup> Pui-lan, *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology*, 215.

<sup>441</sup> *Ibid.*, 162.



Politically speaking, the *Tatmadaw* wants to control its supreme power over KIA/KIO and the Kachin people. The *Tatmadaw* does not want any ethnic armed groups to fight for their ethnic rights. On the other side, the KIA also does not want to live under the system of *Maha Burma* (Bamarization). They want to have their land free, their own sovereignty and self-determination. Taking this into account, it is a political condition that stands behind the religion and racism to cause this war. When I think of the relationship between the Burma colonizers and the colonized Kachin people, it is similar to what Aime Cesaire argues for: “Between colonizer and colonized, there is room only for forced labor, intimidation, pressure, the police, taxation, theft, rape, compulsory crops, contempt, mistrust, arrogance, self-complacency, swinishness, brainless elites, degraded masses.” So, taking this into the context of Kachin people in Myanmar, Bamar-colonization is equal to “thingification” of Kachin.<sup>442</sup>

The *Tatmadaw* is using the colonial mindset that they inherited from the British Empire and colonial rulers. Nelson Maldonado-Torres argues, “the relationship between religion and empire would be at the center of a dramatic transformation from a system of power based on religious differences to one based on racial differences.” It is for this reason that in modernity, the dominant episteme would be defined by “the tension and mutual collaboration between a dynamic relation between empire, religion, and race.”<sup>443</sup> Maldonado-Torres reminds me of how Bamar majority people are using the same method of the combination of empire, religion, and racism to impose on the Kachin ethnic minorities. The Bamar-colonization is also a form of manipulating the ethnic minority

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<sup>442</sup> Aime Cesaire, *Discourse on Colonialism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972), 42.

<sup>443</sup> Nelson Maldonado-Torres, “AAR Centennial Round Table: Religion, Conquest, and Race in the Foundations of the Modern/Colonial World,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* (September 6, 2014): 637.

Kachin people. George M. Fredrickson affirms that racism remains a major international problem and racism is used to describe hostility and discrimination directed against a group of people for any reason.<sup>444</sup> Fredrickson also claims that religion could cause racism and vice versa. Fredrickson's idea of "a religious racism or a racialized religiosity"<sup>445</sup> is very true for the Kachin people. Subalternism strongly tied with the Bamar colonialism made the voices of the Kachin people unheard. Thus, in order to fight against the imperialism of the Burmese government and Bamar racism, it is crucial for the Kachin people to birth postcolonial liberation theologies.

The Kachin people also need a theology of revolution like the Black liberation theology of America. James Cone's theology of liberation is not only a revolutionary tool for the black community in America, but is also very helpful for the development of Kachin liberation theologies. The oppression and discrimination against the Kachin community are still going on. I see that the colonality of Bamar supremacy is, like the system of European colonization, but with different names, ever increasing. The Kachin people need to apply Cone's idea of Black liberation theology. For Cone, Black theology is a product of black experiences, black history, black culture, revelation through the suffering of blacks, reading the Scripture through the eyes of blacks and tradition. Cone argues that the blackness of God is the key to the black understanding of God. The blackness of God is the heart of the black theology. Black theology rejects any

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<sup>444</sup> George M. Fredrickson, *Racism: A Short History* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2002), 139.

<sup>445</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

conception of God that suppresses black self-determination by describing God as a God of all peoples or a God of racism.<sup>446</sup>

Thus, for Kachin liberation theology to decolonize the Bamarism, the Kachin churches need to participate in the liberating works of Christ. The Kachin churches should not be isolated from the realities of human suffering. Seeing Jesus Christ as the Kachin indigenous ritual figures—*Hpan Ningsang Chye Ningchyang*, *Shagu Hkungga*, and *Jaiwa-Dumsa* could be a liberation Christology for the Kachin people. The tasks of Kachin Christians in Myanmar at this point, in postcolonial period, should be twofold: to show our nation and the world that Kachin Christians in Myanmar today are faithful citizens of the country, and to resist and transform the imperialism of Americanization and colonial image of Christianity (colonial Christ) into an indigenous image of life and action. The Kachin people have to reconstruct who Jesus Christ is for them.

### 1. Jesus Christ as *Hpan Ningsang Chye Ningchyang*

In drawing a model of birthing liberation Christology for Kachin people, it is vital to look at Jesus Christ with Kachin indigenous eyes. The Kachin people have their own concept of Christ—*Hpan Ningsang Chye Ningchyang*. According to the Kachin mythology, *Ninggawn Chyunun* and *Hpunggam Woishun* (the universal parents) gave birth to *Hpan Ningsang Chye Ningchyang*. Although “*Hpan Ningsang*” literary means the “creator,” he is not actually the creator. The name “*Chye Ningchyang*” indicates the “one who knows and understands everything, the Omniscient One.” *Hpan Ningsang Chye Ningchyang* is, in this regard, to be regarded as the “Wisdom (Sophia),” who knows all

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<sup>446</sup> James H. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation, 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary ed.* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2010), 66-67.

the things including his parents before him. He gave his name by himself. All the things and beings birthed by *Ninggawn Chyunun* and *Hpunggam Woishun* were given their particular names by *Hpan Ningsang Chye Ningchyang*. *Hpan Ningsang Chye Ningchyang* appointed all the Nats, and he assigned each Nat for human welfare. He guided the destiny of all human beings. The Kachin people have lived according to his words and his interpretation of life in this world.

By reading John 1:1 with the Kachin eyes, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (NRSV), the Kachin people understand that *Hpan Ningsang Chye Ningchyang* is the Logos (the Word) who existed before anything else. He was the incarnated Word—the Wisdom and Power of *Karai Kasang* (God). He was the Word that became flesh, the personal expression of *Karai Kasang* to humankind. Thus, *Hpan Ningsang Chye Ningchyang*, the incarnated Word, is eternal and is both with *Karai Kasang*, yet distinct from God. He is, therefore, identical to *Karai Kasang*, the Supreme and Holy Nat. Nngai Gam states:

To theologize in Christian sense, *Chye Ningchyang* is the wisdom that exists before all creation, but he is not the Creator. Kachin people do not know him, and they do not worship him either. He does not descend down along with mankind of the earth. *Hpan Ningsang* implicitly, means creator, many mean the appointed (anointed) one like Christ (Messiah) for a certain mandate.<sup>447</sup>

In Christian context, God became human as Jesus Christ through Mary and Joseph, specifically through the “womb of Mary,” whereas *Karai Kasang* became *Hpan Ningsang Chye Ningchyang* through *Ninggawn Chyunun* and *Hpunggam Woishun*, particularly through the “womb of *Ninggawn Chyunun*” for the Kachin people. To be a

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<sup>447</sup> Nngai Gam, “Doing Theology with Kachin Cultural Resources,” *Thamar Alin* 5 (2000): 51.

relevant liberative Christology for the Kachin people, Jesus Christ is to be figured as *Hpan Ningsang Chye Ningchyang*—the Sage and the Wisdom Teacher. Concerning the concept of Jesus as the Sage and Wisdom Teacher, Saw Hlaing Bwa, a prominent Myanmar theologian, articulates:

One aspect that sets the fourth gospel apart from Synoptics and gives it a peculiar force, is its personification of Jesus as incarnate logos descended from on high to offer light and truth. As it was influenced by the Wisdom motifs of the Hebrews, the Johannine Jesus speaking in the first person by using the “I am” language is seen as the incarnate wisdom and this incarnation has taken place at a particular history, once and for all.<sup>448</sup>

In this regard, Jesus Christ as *Hpan Ningsang Chye Ningchyang* watches over the lives of the Kachin people and continuously strengthens, nourishes, vitalizes, and liberates them from all kinds of oppression. Then all the Kachin people can have the fullness of soteriological experience and liberation from the Bamarism through the “*Wunpawng Hkristu*”<sup>449</sup> (Kachin Christ)—*Hpan Ningsang Chye Ningchyang*—who is the liberator.

## 2. Jesus Christ as *Shagu Hkungga*

In doing contextual Christology for the liberative Kachin Christian theology, it is essential to describe Jesus Christ as “*Shagu Hkungga*” (the Sacrificial Victim). *Shagu Hkungga* is the most important object and the center offering in Kachin Nat worship.

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<sup>448</sup> Saw Hlaing Bwa, “Towards a Soteriocentric Approach in Mission,” *WAYS: MIT Journal of Theology* vol. 1 (2000): 77-78. According to Hlaing Bwa, to view Jesus the supreme example of divine Wisdom active in history and indeed the divine Wisdom itself, as John did is a clear contrast to the image of Jesus as sage of Wisdom portrayed by the Synoptics. The fact is that Jesus, who enlightened by Wisdom, not only enshrines the Wisdom in the world, is also enshrined by the New Testament literature as the divine Wisdom, because he had come to be conscious of his role as interpreter of the divine Wisdom, but this does not suggest the automatic equation of Jesus with the only Wisdom that can ever happen throughout history and in any other culture.

<sup>449</sup> *Wunpawng* (also called *Jinghpaw Wunpawng*) means the Kachin people and *Hkristu* is Christ; namely, *Wunpawng Hkristu* or *Wunpawng Meshia* (Messiah)—the Kachin Christ.

Without the sacrificial animals, no one can make any offerings and sacrifices to the Nats. All kind of Nats will be pleased only by the offerings through the blood of the sacrificial animals or victims so that the people will not be harmed, and they will be blessed and prosperous. The *Shagu Hkungga*, in this way, is used as the “living object” to reconcile between the Nats and human beings. The blood sacrifice has become, therefore, a part of the Kachin religious life. I also discuss how Mary Grey’s relational theology of atonement is helpful to connect the blood sacrifice of Nat worship with a particular reading of Jesus on the cross with the feminist critiques of sacrificial blood atonement.

Generally, domestic animals such as chickens, cows, buffaloes, pigs, and goats are used as the sacrificial victims for sacrifices. The Kachin people have to give offerings to the particular Nats at different occasions and for different purposes—to appease the offended Nats, to protect and provide immunity from dangers, to free from causing insanity by the Nats, for riches and prosperity, in time of sowing seed and harvest festivals, and to secure help in times of illness. Individuals make some of these sacrifices, families make some; and many sacrifices are performed by the entire community or village. The study of the Kachin Nat worship shows that blood sacrifice is an obligatory part of its cultic sacrificial practice known as “*Shagu Hkungga Nawng Ai*” (offering the sacrifice). The blood of the sacrificial animals or victims is used as a means of propitiations, expiation, atonement, reconciliation and covenant in their socio-religious system.

In the Old Testament, there are various references to the blood sacrifice of the animals, which were used in the ceremonies and rituals. Certainly, the most frequently mentioned means of “atonement” in the Old Testament were the blood sacrifices,

“dominating the use of the term by constant reference in the books of Leviticus and Numbers.”<sup>450</sup> Loraine Boettner remarks that “the practice of blood sacrifice in the ceremonies and rituals in the time of the Old Testament prefigured the death of Jesus Christ.”<sup>451</sup> The New Testament writers clearly see the death of Jesus Christ as fulfilling perfectly all that the Old Testament sacrifices foreshadowed. It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away human sins (Hebrews 10:4), but the blood of Jesus Christ can cleanse the sins (Hebrews 10:10).<sup>452</sup> God has reconciled to himself all things, making peace through the blood of Jesus’ cross (Colossians 1:20).<sup>453</sup>

Theologically speaking, it can be said that the self-manifestation of *Karai Kasang* or the concept of salvation through the blood secretly existed in the traditional beliefs and practice of the blood sacrifice of animals in Kachin Nat worship. It is true that the blood of the sacrificial animals cannot give salvation fully to the Kachin people. The offering by the blood of the animals has nothing to do with “liberation from sins.” On the other hand, it would pave the way for the Kachin people to accept the blood of Jesus Christ as a means of their own salvation. Christianity indicates that Jesus’ sacrifice takes the place of animal sacrifice. The Kachin people have clear eyes and thoughts to see the value of the blood of Jesus Christ as they have already laid the foundation for it through their traditional practices of blood sacrifice. As Paul Hiebert says, “every culture can serve as a vehicle for the communication of the Gospel,”<sup>454</sup> the practices of blood sacrifice in

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<sup>450</sup> Trotter, “Atonement,” 43.

<sup>451</sup> Loraine Boettner, *The Atonement* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1945), 24.

<sup>452</sup> L.L. Morris, “Sacrifice,” *New Dictionary of Theology*, ed., Sinclair B. Ferguson (Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 608.

<sup>453</sup> Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1983), 809.

<sup>454</sup> Paul G. Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985), 55.

Kachin culture prepared a way for them to understand and accept Jesus Christ as the *Shagu Hkungga*—the Sacrificial Victim.

As the offerings to the Nats can only be done through the blood of the victims on the *Wudang* (the cross), the Kachin Christians today can see Jesus Christ as the *Shagu Hkungga*, who died on the “*Wudang*” to cleanse all the sins away and to solemnize the lives of the people. Jesus’ sacrifice takes the place of animal sacrifice. This is closely related to the *Sacrificial Theory of Atonement*.<sup>455</sup> In the Old Testament, “there is a development of the concept of sacrificial form of the sacerdotal and ritual concept found in Leviticus. The development of the sacrificial concept of the Old Testament comes into its fruition in the atoning death of Jesus Christ.”<sup>456</sup> That can be clearly found in the Gospel of John 1:29: “Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (NRSV). Hebrews 2:17 points squarely at Jesus as the high priests of Leviticus 16 who offers a sacrifice of atonement (*hislaskomai*). Leonard S. Walmark aptly states that:

Here the Christology of Hebrews reaches its loftiest peak as Jesus, the eternal high priest, enters the inner sanctum of the universe where he offers up his own body and blood in voluntary submission to God as a sacrifice for sins once, forever, in behalf of all humanity. He is both priest and victim, offered and offering.<sup>457</sup>

Consequently, a better understanding of the atonement of Jesus Christ can be preeminently found in the Sacrificial Theory of Atonement. I also consider here the

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<sup>455</sup> Godfrey Ashby, *Sacrifice, Its Nature and Purpose* (London: SCM Press, 1988). Godfrey Ashby has investigated the development of sacrificial concept from the Hebrew tradition to the New Testament. Athanasius explored this concept and Horace Bushnell, an American Congregationalist theologian, developed the sacrificial concept of atonement in his work *Vicarious Sacrifice* (1866). In relating to the soteriological concept of sacrifice in Nat worship to the doctrine of atonement, there are three classical theories of atonement—dramatic theory, satisfaction theory, and sacrificial theory.

<sup>456</sup> Ibid., 146.

<sup>457</sup> Leonard S. Walmark, “Hebrews, Theology of” *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed., Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996), 335.



feminist theological critiques of sacrificial theories of atonement and how they encourage Kachin women to be sacrificial. There are three primary theories of atonement theology—Substitutionary or Satisfactory theory of atonement, Moral Influence theory of atonement, and Christus Victor theory of atonement.<sup>458</sup> The Substitutionary/Satisfactory theory of atonement asserts that “humans need to make a sacrifice or payment in order to satisfy God’s justice. Such an offering was made by Jesus Christ on behalf of humanity.”<sup>459</sup> The Moral Influence theory of atonement emphasizes the life and ministry of Christ rather than on his suffering and death; rejects the notion of retributive punishment. The Christus Victory theory of atonement emphasizes the victory through Christ’s resurrection over the forces of evil and of death.<sup>460</sup>

Katie M. Deaver argues that these three theories strongly support violence against women. Even though the Substitutionary/Satisfactory theory is based on “Christ’s action and atonement it encourages women to be obedient and to endure their own suffering in the hope of one day being ‘saved’ through that suffering.”<sup>461</sup> The Moral Influence theory also encourages “women to love and suffer, as Christ did, even to the point of death. Similar to the Substitutionary theory the Moral Influence theory also fails to adequately acknowledge the presence of evil that can be found within our world in social structures like patriarchy, sexism, and racism.”<sup>462</sup> The Christus Victory theory “not only considers all aspects of Christ’s life, ministry, death, and resurrection it also address the realities of

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<sup>458</sup> Katie M. Deaver, “A Beginning: Atonement Theology and the Feminist Critique,” in *Feminism and Religion* <https://feminismandreligion.com/2017/06/18/a-beginning-atonement-theology-and-the-feminist-critique-by-katie-m-deaver/>. (accessed February 12, 2019).

<sup>459</sup> Heather Festus, “Bearing One’s Cross: A Critical Analysis of Mary Grey’s Atonement” (MTh thesis, University of the West CAPE, 2008), 8.

<sup>460</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>461</sup> Katie M. Deaver, “A Beginning: Atonement Theology and the Feminist Critique.”

<sup>462</sup> *Ibid.*

evil and oppression within our world. It has the most to offer for survivors of violence as well as for women of faith.”<sup>463</sup> Rita Nakashima Brock and Rebecca Ann Parker also views all these atonement motifs as mystifying violence and abuse.<sup>464</sup> These theories of the atonement have both positive and negative results for people of faith, however, they are very dangerous for Kachin women. These theories can elevate the suffering of Kachin women, and therefore can encourage domestic violence against Kachin women.

In response to these theories of atonement from a feminist critiques of sacrificial blood atonement, Mary Grey argues that “the work of Christ on the cross should not just focus on death on the cross, but also on the value of the ministry and life of Jesus. The death of Jesus should not be interpreted as God’s wrath against the guilt of humanity, but in fact sees the cross as a symbol against anything that would be a blockage to mutuality in relation.”<sup>465</sup> Grey sees “Jesus Christ as the embodiment of God’s relational passionate energy and Jesus Christ as a driving power who brings forth wholeness in mutual-relationships between men and women. For Grey, Jesus Christ is the living example of mutual power in relationships.”<sup>466</sup> Grey affirms that the birthing of God symbol, as the creative energy, proposes a notion of “the Christ of mutuality and relationality” through a life giving process and not through death and destruction because it is a link between women’s experience and redemption.<sup>467</sup> Thus, the constructive Kachin feminist theology needs to stress that the patriarchal symbols of the cross should be replaced with symbols of “giving birth to new creation, of connection through separation, growth through stasis,

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<sup>463</sup> Ibid.

<sup>464</sup> Festus, “Bearing One’s Cross: A Critical Analysis of Mary Grey’s Atonement,” 23.

<sup>465</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>466</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>467</sup> Ibid., 50.

integration through falling apart, healing through mutuality, compassion and solidarity.”<sup>468</sup> I find that Grey’s relational theology of atonement allows Kachin women to admit their brokenness and need for healing and wholeness for themselves, as well as their wounded environment.

Sacrifice has become, in this sense, a vital significance in the life of Nat worship. The constructive theology of Christ’s atonement will enhance a special significance for today’s Kachin churches to grasp a thoughtful theological concept of atonement. It can, therefore, be realized that the Kachin people have their own concept of the “*theologia crucis* (Theology of the Cross).” It is already implanted in the hearts of the Kachin Nat worship. They come to see that *Karai Kasang* used the *Wudang* (the Cross), through Christ, as the “saving instrument” to express the wonder of God’s redeeming love. Most importantly, it would demonstrate that, through their foundation of the traditional practices of blood sacrifice of the sacrificial victims on the *Wudang*, the Kachin people could come to understand and accept the incarnated Christ—*Hpan Ningsang Chye Ningchyang* as the *Shagu Hkunga*. The *Wudang*, the standpoint of Kachin Christian faith, is the supreme symbol of *Karai Kasang*’s suffering love. In the *Wudang* the Kachin people may realize that suffering is not merely physical, institutional, impersonal, and secular. It is indigenous, religious, and human. Suffering is the *Wudang Karai Kasang* has to bear with all creations. The *Wudang* brings hope to the Kachin women that otherwise is subject to exploitation and inhumanity. This love is, therefore, redemptive in nature as was the love of Christ on the *Wudang*. The *Wudang* shows how a new creation

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<sup>468</sup> Ibid., 52.

must come into being through intense pain and suffering. The whole being of *Karai Kasang* aches in Jesus Christ as the *Shagu Hkungga* on the *Wudang*.

### 3. Jesus Christ as *Jaiwa-Dumsa*

Another analogy to envision Jesus Christ through the ritual figures in Kachin Nat worship is the *Jaiwa-Dumsa*. In doing relevant contextual Christology for Kachin people, it is important to portray Jesus Christ as *Jaiwa-Dumsa*, the Priest and High Priest who have functional similarities in many ways.

Regarding this, one striking thing about the priesthoods of Jesus Christ is that he became the *Jaiwa-Dumsa* and the *Shagu Hkungga* synchronously and thereby surpassed all other earthly priests and victims. In his book, *Jesus Christ in Modern Thought*, John Macquarrie discusses the uniqueness of the Priesthood of Jesus Christ and his sacrificial offering of himself as follows:

The priestly sacrifice of Jesus was unique, as it also his continuing high priesthood. Despite the fact that in the New Testament ministers are never called “priests” (*hieries*), Christians came to see the priestly role of Christ reflected in these ministers and used priestly terms in describing them. Because the Eucharist is the memorial of the sacrifice of Christ, the action of the presiding minister in reciting the words of Christ at the last supper and distributing to the assembly the holy gifts is seen to stand in a sacramental relation to what Christ himself did in offering his own sacrifice.<sup>469</sup>

Although the high priesthood of Jesus is often described solely in terms of his status according to the order of Melchizedek, Hebrews 2-4 devotes a great deal of attention to the matter of the high priesthood of Jesus before introducing Melchizedek in

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<sup>469</sup> This statement is declared by the Anglican-Roman Catholic “Agreed Statement” on ministry. John Macquarrie quoted this statement from ARCIC Final Report, SPCK and CTS (1981), 35. See John Macquarrie, *Jesus Christ in Modern Thought* (London: SCM Press, 1990), 135.

Hebrews 5:6. In Hebrews 2:7, the writer of Hebrews describes Jesus Christ as the one who has come to our aid as our high priest by making “atonement for the sins of the people.”<sup>470</sup> The superiority of Jesus’ priestly order has entailed the shift of Jesus’ priesthood from “particular,” meaning for one particular racial group, to “universality,” for the whole people.

To this point, by reading the Epistle to the Hebrews presenting Jesus Christ as *Jaiwa-Dumsa*, both the High Priest and the Priest can be relevant in doing liberation Christology of today’s Kachin churches. This concept could deepen the inter-relationship between the Kachin people and Jesus Christ, so that their relationship will become more personal, and will form a thoughtful foundation for the liberation of the Kachin people from all forms of dominations and exploitations. Thus, through the roles and functions of *Jaiwa-Dumsa*, *Hpan Ningsang Chye Ningchyang*, Jesus Christ could become the Wisdom, the Logos, the Sage and Teacher, and the Guide for the Kachin people. Just as Kachin people seek the advice of *Jaiwa-Dumsa* is resorted to in times of trouble and oppression, Jesus Christ can be conceived of as the *person*, *Jaiwa-Dumsa*, from whom the Kachin people can intimately seek guidance and assistance in the times of their sufferings. Seeing Jesus Christ as the *Jaiwa-Dumsa* enlightens the Kachin people to categorize Jesus Christ himself as the Kachin—*Jesus is a Kachin*. It is through this, the functions and roles of Jesus Christ that the Kachin people could have a deeper understanding of liberation Christology.

As Christology is “the task of the church and its central effort should be acknowledging the mystery and explaining the meaning of the person and work of Jesus

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<sup>470</sup> Richard E. Averbeck, “Priest, Priesthood,” *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed., Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996), 636.

Christ,”<sup>471</sup> the acknowledgement of Jesus Christ as *Jaiwa-Dumsa* could help the Kachin people accept the Lordship of Jesus Christ through his *humanity*—his person and work. In this sense, the Jesus Christ whom the Kachin people have is born out of their own womb and is living together with their struggle day-to-day. *Hpan Ningsang Chye Ningchyang* the pre-existence of Jesus Christ in Kachin Nat worship then could be meaningful for the Kachin people.

For the construction of a liberation Christology for the Kachin people, Jesus Christ as the ritual figures—*Hpan Ningsang Chye Ningchyang* and the *Shagu Hkungga*—could be expressed with the roles and functions of the *Jaiwa-Dumsa*. With these connections, the Kachin people could draw on Jesus Christ as the liberator at the social, economic, and political levels of the Kachin people. To present Jesus Christ as the liberator for the Kachin people, Jesus Christ should be the “conqueror” of Bamarism. Jesus Christ as the liberator, in this common sense, can liberate the Kachin people from the enslavement of the malevolent Nats by giving hope or salvation in the light of the gospel. The salvation of all the Kachin people is centered upon Christ the Liberator. Gustavo Gutierrez declares that:

Salvation is not something other worldly, in regard to which the present life is merely a test. Salvation—the communion of men with God and the communion of men among themselves—is something which embraces all human reality, transforms it, and leads it to its fullness in Christ: “Thus the center of God’s salvific design is Jesus Christ, who by his death and resurrection transforms the universe and makes it possible for man to reach fulfillment as a human being.” This fulfillment embraces every aspect of humanity: body and spirit, individual and society, person and cosmos, time and eternity.<sup>472</sup>

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<sup>471</sup> S. J. Samartha, “The Unbound Christ: Toward A Christology In India Today,” *What Asian Christians Are Thinking*, ed., Douglas J. Elwood (Philippine: New Day Publishers, 1976), 221.

<sup>472</sup> Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 85.

By this account, it can be claimed that salvation and liberation cannot be separated and thus, *salvation is liberation*. To present Jesus Christ as the liberator for the socio-economic situation of the Kachin people, Jesus Christ must be “reincarnated” in the river of the “poverty of the Kachin people.” To depict Jesus Christ as the liberator, the Kachin Christians should have a right perspective on poverty and on how Jesus Christ is relevant in that socio-economic crisis. Explicitly speaking, the root cause of poverty in Kachin society is not merely an economic exploitation, but the result of the unjust social and political systems of Bamarism. It is in these realities of both “a struggle to be poor and a struggle for the poor”<sup>473</sup> that a practicable contextual Kachin liberation Christology must be constructed. Leonardo Boff has brightly articulated:

Every given type of Christology is relevant in its own way, depending on its functional relationship to the socio-historical situation: in that sense it is a committed Christology... As an ordered and elaborated knowledge of the faith, Christology takes shape within the context of a particular moment in history: it is produced under certain specific modes of material, ideal, cultural... A Christology that proclaims Jesus Christ as the Liberator seeks to be committed to the economic, social and political liberation of those groups that are oppressed and dominated...<sup>474</sup>

In full responsiveness of Jesus Christ as the liberator, today’s Kachin churches have to engage in struggle for the liberation of the socio-economic and political realities of the Kachin society. Thus, what today’s Kachin people need is not *Christology from above* that is concerned only with the other worldly matters—to judge the sins of the people and neglect the social and political injustice of the Burmese government. Rather,

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<sup>473</sup> Aloysius Pieris defines that both for Jesus and his followers, spirituality is not merely a struggle to be poor but equally a struggle for the poor. Aloysius Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books), 15.

<sup>474</sup> Leonardo Boff, *Jesus Christ Liberator: A Critical Christology of Our Time* (London: SPCD, 1980), 266.

what the Kachin people need is *Christology from below*,<sup>475</sup> a Christ who lives together with suffering people—the poor, the oppressed, the marginalized and discriminated and who died for their liberation from all those boundaries. Nngai Gam says:

Jesus is the friend of the oppressed. He is a man who loved the oppressed as his neighbors and treated them equally. He did not as a revolutionary, but he gave great relief to oppressed people. He also criticized the socio-political and religious authorities as well as their supporters, particularly with regard to the pharisaic interpretation of the Law. In this sense, he protested against the religious and social oppression of his time. He was condemned and killed by the political authority as a political Messiah, for this was the false charge that the religious authorities used as a pretext for turning him over to Pilate.<sup>476</sup>

Taking this into account, today's Kachin people have to look at Jesus Christ as the "Political Messiah," who died on the *Wudang* of the sufferings of the Kachin people. In particular, Jesus Christ the liberator in the Kachin indigenous ritual figures—*Hpan Ningsang Chye Ningchyang*, *Shagu Hkungga* and *Jaiwa-Dumsa*, should be called as "Wunpawng Meshia" (Kachin Messiah). By using Jesus Christ as *Hpan Ningsang Chye Ningchyang*, *Shagu Hkungga*, and *Jaiwa-Dumsa*, all the Kachin people will come to know that they are not the *objects* but the *subject* of transformation, who can lead the whole community to liberation from the evil structure, to incarnate the Kingdom of *Karai Kasang*. In this sense, the liberative Kachin indigenous Christology could help Kachin

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<sup>475</sup> *Christology from above* begins with doctrinal affirmations about the person of Christ and ontological status and later move to consideration of the life and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth. This starts with the doctrines of the incarnation and the Trinity and then asks exactly the Logos or Second Person of the Trinity, took on human form. This is the western classical view and it stresses that Jesus' divine nature is over his immanence and humanity. *Christology from below* begins with the Jesus who actually lived and taught in first-century Palestine and moves later to ontic Christological affirmations. Jesus as a fully human is who in and through his humanity reveals his divinity. Jesus identified with his fellow human beings and particularly with the poor and oppressed as starting point for Christology. For details, see Stephen T. Davis, ed., *Encountering Jesus: A Debate on Christology* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988), 2.

<sup>476</sup> Nngai Gam, "Doing theology with Kachin Culture Resources," 42.



Christians decolonize the Bamarism and could help them build a better democracy in today's Kachin land.

#### 4. *Karai Kasang* as the Overcoming of Evil

The KIA/KIO has a motto, “*Anhte a Awng Padang Yehowa Karai Kasang* (Jehovah God, our Victory),”<sup>477</sup> for this war to fight against the *Tatmadaw*. There is also a theme song for this war with this same title, “*Awng Padang Yehowa*” (Victorious Jehovah) composed by Lahpai Zau H pang, to encourage the KIA soldiers.<sup>478</sup> This song reminds KIA soldiers that only God can give them the victory over the *Tatmadaw*. In his speech on January 27, 2012 at Laiza, the headquarter of KIO, General Gunhtang Gam Shawng, the Chief of Staff of KIA, says “it is God who gives us the power, the strength to fight against the Burmese soldiers, we Kachin people will surely win this war by putting our faith in God and firmly stand on our religion because God is our victory.”<sup>479</sup> Is it right for the Kachin people to pray to God to kill the Burmese soldiers for liberation? Is violence the only way to end this war? Such questions caused me to think deeply about the Divine compassion regarding this war between the KIA and the *Tatmadaw*.

In such situations of bitter pain and struggle for liberation, if I say *Karai Kasang*'s love or *Karai Kasang*'s Divine compassion is also together with our enemies, the oppressor *Tatmadaw*, there is no doubt that many Kachin Christians will be giving up their faith or I will be kicked out of my Kachin community. *Karai Kasang* is not only the

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<sup>477</sup> The basic Scripture texts are Psalms 60:12, I Corinthians 15:57.

<sup>478</sup> For the visual presentation of this song by the KIA soldiers, see EEDY Kachin News, “Anhte a Awng Padang Yehowa Karai Kasang” (Jehovah God, Our Victory), YouTube Video, 5:16, March 31, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=za14PkHSTW0>.

<sup>479</sup> See the video of General Gunhtang Gam Shawng's speech Part I, Part II, and Final Part in Kachin at Kachinland News, <http://vimeo.com/37456094> <http://vimeo.com/37479396> <http://vimeo.com/37652380> (accessed September 26, 2018).

*Karai Kasang* of the oppressed and the ethnic minority, but also the *Karai Kasang* of oppressors and the majority. *Karai Kasang* is on the side of the oppressed Kachin people as well as on side of the Bamar oppressors. *Karai Kasang* is not only love, but *Karai Kasang* is also the overcoming of evil. In *Religion in the Making*, Whitehead expresses that God is the overcoming of evil by good. For Whitehead, “this transmutation of evil into good enters into the actual world by reason of the inclusion of the nature of God, which includes the ideal vision of each actual evil so met with a novel consequent as to issue in the restoration of goodness.”<sup>480</sup> Coleman stresses that “God relegates evil to the edges, saving that which is good within God’s own self. This is the kingdom of heaven. Only here is evil truly eliminated.”<sup>481</sup> She further explains that Whitehead has many ways of describing the role of God in responding to evil, such as “God seeks to eliminate evil” and “God is able to redeem evil within the kingdom of heaven.”<sup>482</sup> As the Kachin people correspond to the calling of *Karai Kasang* to the world, they can eliminate the evil of the Bamar oppressors. As *Karai Kasang* is struggling together with the oppressed Kachin people for liberation, *Karai Kasang* is also together with the Bamar oppressors to transform their evil or Bamar racism.

Here I found that Andrew Sung Park’s Korean idea of *han* is applicable to the *han* of the Kachin people. In his book, *The Wounded Heart of God*, Park claims that God’s *han*, the wounded heart of God, is exposed on the cross. God’s love for humans suffers on the cross. The cross represents God’s full participation in the suffering of the victims.

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<sup>480</sup> Whitehead, *Religion in the Making*, 139.

<sup>481</sup> Coleman, *Making a Way Out of No Way*, 71.

<sup>482</sup> Ibid.

God is fully present in the victim's suffering.<sup>483</sup> I see that Park's idea of God's *han* is also compatible with the process notion of God as co-sufferer, relational, and panentheistic. Process thought also claims that everything is "relational" because relatedness is primary, and relational power is the ability *both* to affect *and* to be affected.

This process concept of Panentheism helps Kachin people understand *Karai Kasang*'s *han* as relational; *Karai Kasang* is *in* the world, and the world is also in *Karai Kasang*. *Karai Kasang* is together with the *han* of Kachin people. *Karai Kasang* suffers together with the Kachin IDPs. I believe that even though *Karai Kasang* cannot do anything to the Bamar enemies with unilateral and coercive power, *Karai Kasang* can persuade or lure them to prevent this terrible war. I believe that the Kachin people are not fighting against the Burmese soldiers, but they are fighting against the "evil" of the Burmese government and the unjust systems. Thus, I claim that *Karai Kasang* is together with the liberation process of the Kachin people. *Karai Kasang*'s divine love is the end of the evil. Therefore, *Karai Kasang* is not only co-sufferer with all the victims of this war, but also *Karai Kasang* lures the possible way to transform the exploitations, oppressions, and discrimination against human rights. "Love your enemies" does not mean to give up the struggle against injustice and to obey the will of the enemies, but to love enemies is to change their evil through the compassion and love of *Karai Kasang*. For example, if you really love someone, you would persuade that person to transform his/her wrongness. I hope that the Kachin people can change the hearts of the Burmese government by showing them the divine love of *Karai Kasang*, which can help heal the Kachin land to

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<sup>483</sup> Andrew Sung Park. *The Wounded Heart of God: The Asian Concept of Han and the Christian Doctrine of Sin* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 121.

become a greater good or greater beauty. In Romans 12:21, Paul says, “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (NRSV).

According to Gustavo Guterrez, a theology of liberation is “born of the gospel and experiences of the poor and oppressed to abolish the current unjust situation and to build a better society, which is free and more human.”<sup>484</sup> Of course, I believe that the Kachin liberation theology can be done only by actively participating in the struggle, which the exploited Kachin social classes have undertaken against their Bamar oppressors. Gutierrez asserts, “liberation from every form of exploitation, the possibility of a more human and dignified life, the creation of a new humankind have to pass through this struggle.”<sup>485</sup> I totally agree with Gutierrez that “overcoming the colonial mentality is one of the important tasks of the Christian community.”<sup>486</sup> Gutierrez’s idea is very profound and true for postcolonial Kachin liberation theology.

Moreover, the Kachin people need to apply the concept of truth and *ahimsa* (non-violent), the spirituality of Mahatama Gandhi. Gandhi’s hope for social change under British colonization was grounded in his conviction of *ahimsa*. It was *ahimsa* that allowed Gandhi’s social and historical context to conceive of ultimate reality pluralistically and to exercise tolerance and empathy for the positions of those with whom he disagreed. For Gandhi, “*ahimsa* and truth (*satya*) are so intertwined, that it is practically impossible to disentangle and separate them.”<sup>487</sup> Thus, a Gandhian view of *ahimsa* is the means and truth is the end and in its positive form, *ahimsa* means the

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<sup>484</sup> Guterrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, xiii.

<sup>485</sup> Ibid., 174.

<sup>486</sup> Ibid., 77.

<sup>487</sup> Nathmal Tatia, “The Jain Worldview and Ecology,” in *Jainism and Ecology: Nonviolence in the Web of Life*, ed. Christopher Key Chapple (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 13.

largest love, greatest charity.<sup>488</sup> Gandhi urges, “If I am a follower of *ahimsa*, I must love my enemy.” This active form of *ahimsa* necessarily includes truth and fearlessness.<sup>489</sup> *Ahimsa*, thus, is the guiding principle of Gandhi’s civil disobedience in the cause of freedom and social equality.<sup>490</sup> Gandhi took the notion of *ahimsa* to support his social change in order to have independence from the British Empire. In his autobiography, Gandhi expresses *ahimsa* as a comprehensive principle. Gandhi urges:

We are helpless mortals caught in the conflagration of *himsa*...Man cannot for a moment live without consciously or unconsciously committing outward *himsa*. The very fact of his living—eating, drinking and moving about—necessarily involves some *himsa*, destruction of life, be it ever so minute. A votary of *ahimsa* therefore remains true to his faith if the spring of all his actions is compassion, if he shuns to the best of his ability the destruction of the tiniest creature, tries to save it, and thus incessantly strives to be free from the deadly coil of *himsa*. He will be constantly growing in self-restraint and compassion, but he can never become entirely free from outward *himsa*.<sup>491</sup>

As for Gandhi, truth and *ahimsa* are also necessary for the Kachin people to move forward to have liberation from the Bamar-colonization. The Kachin churches must place *ahimsa* at the center of their struggle for the liberation with social justice and equality.

Guttermann asserts that “the Exodus narrative is fundamentally a political story; it is an ideological telling of a people’s history—a story that in the telling not only engages in rhetoric in order to define and raise the political stakes, but also defines the identity of a people, the ancient Israelites.”<sup>492</sup> The Kachin churches, therefore, need to create their own version of the Exodus stories, not just for fighting against the evil systems and unjust

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<sup>488</sup> Ibid.

<sup>489</sup> Ibid.

<sup>490</sup> L. M. Singhvi, “Appendix: The Jain Declaration on Nature,” in *Jainism and Ecology: Nonviolence in the Web of Life*, ed. Christopher Key Chapple (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 218.

<sup>491</sup> Mohandas K. Gandhi, *An Autobiography: The Story of My Experiments with Truth* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1957), 349.

<sup>492</sup> Guttermann, *Prophetic Politics*, 11.

laws, but also for their ethnic identity, religious, political, and socio-economic freedom. I agree with Gutterman when he claims, “the realm of democratic politics is an unsettled and unsettling place—a wilderness—for everyone.”<sup>493</sup> Every Kachin has been suffering from many tragedies and pains in this journey of wilderness to reach their own liberation. Most Kachin churches are well aware that war is not the end of evils—oppressions, discriminations, and exploitations. Violence could not give the answer for the liberation movement of the Kachin people. The Kachin Christian subalterns need to use the Christian concept of “love your enemies” as religious scaffolding to help people understand a deeper meaning of love and nonviolence as relational—even with the enemies. Thus, the Kachin churches need to engage in political dialogue between the KIA/KIO and the *Tatmadaw* to initiate peace and reconciliation in terms of justice and truth. In this sense, the postcolonial Kachin liberation theology could help Kachin Christian subalterns decolonize the Bamarism and could help them build a better democracy in today’s Kachin land.

### C. Building Kachin Postcolonial Feminist Theology

In this section, I respond to the impacts of colonialism and globalization on Kachin women from a perspective of postcolonial feminist theology. I use Kwok’s critiques of how colonization has always involved the exploitation of natural resources, and green imperialism seeks to control and privatize basic necessities of women in Kachin land. I then discuss how Maria Lugones’s insights are helpful for a Kachin decolonial feminism—the possibility of overcoming the colonality of gender, as a way

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<sup>493</sup> Ibid., 171.

of understanding the oppression of Kachin women who have been subalternized through a combined racialization of Bamarism, colonization of British imperialism and American missionaries.

Mandy Sadan argues that the impact of colonial rule on Kachin society “not only challenges the dominant narratives of Burmese nationalism,” but also has “the capacity to overturn some significant models of modern Kachin history and to challenge contemporary hierarchies within Kachin society itself.”<sup>494</sup> According to Human Rights Watch report on July 25, 2018, “the widespread sexual violence perpetrated by Burmese soldiers has been a hallmark of the culture of abuse and impunity in Burma’s decades-long civil wars with its ethnic groups.”<sup>495</sup> Despite their promises of ceasefire and peace building, “the *Tatmadaw* continues to shield its soldiers from prosecution for crimes committed in military operations, including in Kachin, Shan, and Rakhine states. Military rape is linked to other abuses, including extrajudicial killings, torture, arson, land confiscation, and denial of humanitarian aid.”<sup>496</sup>

In response to the impacts of colonialism on Kachin women, I construct a Kachin postcolonial feminist theology. In her *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology*, Kwok develops a postcolonial thought through the lens of a feminist theology, particularly Third World/Asian feminist theologies. Kwok criticizes the colonial paradigm, including White feminism, gender binarism, homophobia, and androcentric language. Kwok not only examines the gender bias within Scripture and culture, but she

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<sup>494</sup> Sadan, *Being and Becoming Kachin*, 463.

<sup>495</sup> Human Rights Watch, “Sexual Violence by the Burma Military Against Ethnic Minorities,” July 25, 2018. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/07/25/sexual-violence-burmese-military-against-ethnic-minorities> (accessed September 10, 2018).

<sup>496</sup> Ibid.

also argues the politics and rhetoric of subordination and otherness. She explains, “postcolonial critics in their reconstructive readings of the text highlight the struggles and resistance in the different colonial context, lift up the voices of women and other subalterns, and are sensitive to postcolonial concerns such as hybridity, deterritorialization, and hyphenated or multiple identities.”<sup>497</sup> Kwok is right in her critiques of how colonization has always involved the exploitation of natural resources and green imperialism that seeks to control and privatize basic necessities of women in Kachin land.

According to Kwok, “women in the Third World witness their subsistence and their role as managers of water and forest eroded and changed by the arrival of multinational corporations. Deforestations, pollution, environmental racism, and other ecological disasters have wreaked havoc on the livelihood of poor women who simply dream of sufficient fuel and clean drinking water. These life-and-death concerns necessitate theological reflections that take seriously consideration of ecological, feminist, and liberationist perspectives.”<sup>498</sup> Kwok seeks to unpack the inadequacies of traditional feminist theology and provide a fresh and fuller perspective on the needs of women in relation to Christianity in a post- or neo-colonial world. She complains that in the late 1960’s feminist thinkers, “...did not pay sufficient attention to how white women had collaborated in colonialism and slavery. Thus, some feminist theologians, like the rest of the feminist scholars, reproduced some of the colonialist assumptions in religious discourse.”<sup>499</sup>

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<sup>497</sup> Pui-lan. *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology*, 79.

<sup>498</sup> *Ibid.*, 163.

<sup>499</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.



Kwok finds traditional Western feminist theology lacking and offers three recommendations to better apply feminist theology to a Kachin postcolonial context. Kwok first insists that feminist theologians must overcome a binary concept of gender, “...as if gender is stable and fixed, not open to question or negotiation.”<sup>500</sup> The wide range of oppressive imperialistic experiences which women experience is ignored by a narrow definition of gender which limits the concept of equality to symbolic cultural ideas. Next, Kwok presses for a postcolonial feminism which stresses queer sexuality in order to destabilize the binary notion of gender and fuse sexual oppression with other forms of power relationships in culture.<sup>501</sup> Again, I see Kwok challenging theologians to adopt a broader postcolonial perspective than that offered by traditional Western feminist theology. Finally, “the most important contribution of postcolonial feminist theology will be to recapitulate the relation of theology and empire through the multiple lenses of gender, race, class, sexuality, religion, and so forth.”<sup>502</sup> This is realized through actions, such as allowing political equality to fuel theological inquiry and redefining the person of Jesus Christ along marginalized cultural concepts, such as Black Christ, Bi-Christ, Christ as Corn Mother.<sup>503</sup>

Kwok’s observations about the limited scope of traditional Western feminist theology are helpful to the Kachin postcolonial feminist cause. She serves as a voice of breadth and depth in her reaction to the oppressive cultural forms introduced by imperialism. To put it simply, Kachin people have to dismantle the American-oriented Christianity in order to become the “Kachin-oriented Christianity.” Orientalism,

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<sup>500</sup> Ibid., 129.

<sup>501</sup> Ibid., 142.

<sup>502</sup> Ibid., 144.

<sup>503</sup> Ibid., 174.

according to Edward Said, means scholarly knowledge of Asian cultures, languages, and peoples. As a form of academic discourse, it was “a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between the Orient and the Occident.”<sup>504</sup> Said defines Orientalism as “a Western style of dominating, restricting and having authority over the Orient.”<sup>505</sup> Said further argues that “so impressive have the descriptive and textual successes of Orientalism been that entire periods of the Orient’s cultural, political, and social history are considered mere responses to the West. The West is the actor, the Orient a passive reactor. The West is the spectator, the judge and jury, of every facet of Oriental behavior.”<sup>506</sup> Taking this into account in the Kachin context, the Kachin people were orientalized by the British colonization and the American missions as well as the Bamar coloniality to be submitted as inferior. Thus, it is very important to free Kachin women from the double colonization under such imperialism. The Kachin churches should no longer be “passive reactor,” rather they should be “active actors.” Then the Kachin churches will be unchained from the imperialism of American culture or Americanization. I agree with Leela Gandhi that “the encounter with feminism urges postcolonialism to produce a more critical and self-reflexive account of cultural nationalism.”<sup>507</sup> Thus, postcolonialism offers feminism the conceptual tool box to see multiple sites of oppression and to reject universalisms around gendered experiences of both men and women in today’s Kachin churches.<sup>508</sup>

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<sup>504</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 2.

<sup>505</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>506</sup> *Ibid.*, 108-109.

<sup>507</sup> Gandhi, *Postcolonial Theory*, 102.

<sup>508</sup> Swati Parashar, “Feminism and Postcolonialism: (En)gendering Encounters,” in *Postcolonial Studies* 2016, vol. 19 no. 4.

According to Maria Lugones, the coloniality of gender builds upon the coloniality of power, which is understood to act to dismantle “Other” knowledge and ways of life.<sup>509</sup> Colonization altered the indigenous sense of self and identity, as well as understandings of cosmology, and of gender relations. For Lugones, “gender is a colonial construction”<sup>510</sup> and it “was introduced by Western colonizers and became a tool for domination that designates two binary oppositions and hierarchical social categories; women became defined by their subordinate relation to men in all categories.”<sup>511</sup> Colonization thus “created the concepts of gender and patriarchy” in the context of Kachin; “the inferiorization of the indigenous and the imposition of gender accompanied the inferiorization of indigenous women.”<sup>512</sup> Lugones argues that related hierarchies were constructed by colonizers to create a binary division between men and women, describing this distinction as “a mark of the human and a mark of civilization. Only the civilized are men or women,” which excluded Indigenous peoples and Africans as being non-human animals, while upholding the status of “bourgeois European women” as passive reproductive servants of “white bourgeois” male colonizers.<sup>513</sup>

Lugones writes that through murder and rape, control of colonized bodies institutionalized the internalization of colonial systems. Religious indoctrination, with

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<sup>509</sup> Maria Lugones, “Coloniality of Gender,” in *The Palgrave Handbook of Gender and Development: Critical Engagements in Feminist Theory and Practice*, ed., Wendy Harcourt (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 14.

<sup>510</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>511</sup> “Coloniality of Gender,” from Global Social Theory <https://globalsocialtheory.org/topics/coloniality-of-gender/> (accessed September 24, 2018).

<sup>512</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>513</sup> Maria Lugones, “Toward a Decolonial Feminism,” in *Hypatia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy*, vol. 25 no. 4 (Fall, 2010), 743.

divisions between good and evil equating colonized females with Satan, established not only a colonization of bodies, but of memory.<sup>514</sup> She argues:

The civilizing transformation justified the colonization of memory, and thus of people's senses of self, of intersubjective relation, of their relation to the spirit world, to land, to the very fabric of their conception of reality, identity and social, ecological, and cosmological organization. Thus, as Christianity became the most powerful instrument in the mission of transformation, the normativity that connected gender and civilization became intent on erasing community, ecological practices, knowledge of planting, of weaving, of the cosmos, and not only on changing and controlling reproductive and sexual practices.<sup>515</sup>

Lugones provides decolonial feminism—the possibility of overcoming the colonality of gender, as a way of understanding the oppression of Kachin women who have been subalternized through a combined racialization of Bamarism, colonization of British imperialism and American missionaries. Decolonial feminism, like postcolonial feminism, forms part of the third wave of feminism and provides a structure for understanding and constructing identity for Kachin women. Kachin decolonial feminism deconstructs Western gender concepts that have become normalized and seeks to recover Kachin worldviews of gender and incorporate them into Kachin postcolonial feminist discourse.

The Kachin postcolonial feminist theology seeks to account for the way that racism, and the political, economic, and cultural effects of colonialism that impacts Kachin women in a postcolonial world. It develops to analyze the racialized gender oppression under the colonial systems of social, sexual, ecological, and hierarchy. Not only has the idea of gender and sexuality to be changed because of the impacts of colonialism, but the power distribution and family structure as well. Postcolonial Kachin

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<sup>514</sup> Ibid., 745.

<sup>515</sup> Ibid.

communities, therefore, have to change their concept of leadership from a single, authoritative figure to a more communal that gives Kachin women very powerful roles within the Kachin society. Kachin women are no longer to be seen as submissive and capable of acting in supportive roles for men. Kachin men are also no longer seen to be the head of the family; Kachin women are to be allowed to make decisions. The Kachin postcolonial feminist theology supports Kachin women to be the center of life and enlarges spiritual roles and control over the family and the community.

## CHAPTER SIX

### CONSTRUCTING KACHIN PROCESS ECOFEMINIST THEOLOGY IN MYANMAR

In order to liberate the Kachin people from the influences of patriarchal and hierarchal systems of Kachin culture and of Christianity, I am attempting to reconstruct the transcendence-immanence, the panentheism, and non-dualism of *Karai Kasang*. This helps Kachins see God with a new lens of *Karai Kasang* as Goddess to birth Kachin ecofeminist theology. I use the concepts and elements of Nat worship, process theology, and ecofeminist theology to enrich the ecofeminist spirituality in the Kachin context. I discuss how patriarchal theology legitimized both the oppression and domination of nature and the existence of hierarchical relationships among all beings. I criticize the traditional dualistic understandings of nature, male domination of women and of nature as no longer effective for today's Kachin churches. I find a new set of symbols and language that transform the interrelations of men and women, humans and earth, humans and the divine, and the divine and the earth. Thus, Nat worship is a starting point to make a connection with the process-relational feminist theology, by which Kachin Christians can recapture their own concept of Goddess, *Karai Kasang*. Ecofeminism is the critical and analytical method that explores the interconnections between the domination of nature and the domination of women, including social classes.<sup>516</sup> This perspective also allows Kachin people to retain Christianity, but also to integrate with the Nat worship for constructing Kachin ecofeminist theology.

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<sup>516</sup> The word "ecofeminism," as a third wave of feminism, was first coined in 1972 by Francoise d'Eaubonne, who argues that the destruction of the planet is due to the profit motif inherent in male power and women as central to bringing about an ecological revolution. See Ruether, *Integrating Ecofeminism, Globalization, and World Religions*, 91.

## A. Rereading the Genesis Creation Story with Kachin Ecofeminist Eyes

In her book, *Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing*, Rosemary Ruether states that “creation stories are the blueprints of society.”<sup>517</sup> They reflect how the divine and the mortal, male and female, humans and non-humans are related to each other. I apply Ruether’s views of how the three classical creation stories—the Babylonian creation story (*Enuma Elish*), the Hebrew creation story (Genesis 1), and the Greek creation story (Plato’s *Timaues*)—shaped “the classical systems of patriarchy that were being codified and functioned to sacralize relations of dominations.”<sup>518</sup>

When I read the Kachin creation story, the Kachin tradition has only the “birth concept” rather than the “creation concept” in the Genesis creation story. In *Enuma Elish*, the lords of the newly ascendant city-state of Babylonia, and its god, Marduk, did not assume they preexisted the world. The earliest world is seen as “matriarchal.” The female is dominant with subordinate male consorts. The earliest model of generation is a parthenogenetic gestation. Apsu, the primordial begetter of all things, commingles in a single body with the Goddess, Tiamat, who bears all things. The gods and goddesses gestate within this commingled male-female union. Finally, this story mandates the basic class of a “hierarchy of rulers and slaves.”<sup>519</sup> By contrast, in Genesis 1, the Creator coexists with primal “stuff” of the cosmos and is in serene control of the process. But, unlike in *Enuma Elish*, the strife between Creator and the primal Mother has been eliminated.<sup>520</sup> In Plato’s *Timaues*, like the work of Babylonia Marduk and of the Hebrew Creator, the Demiurgos creates by “making.” The early story is one of birthing that

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<sup>517</sup> Ruether, *Gaia and God*, 15.

<sup>518</sup> Ibid.

<sup>519</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>520</sup> Ibid., 19.

later (in Marduk's time) becomes one of making or ordering. It is clear that the Babylonian story has both ideas present (early "birthing" mother and later male "ordering" god). Ruether explains, "the metaphor for cosmogenesis is taken from the work of the artisan, who shapes things from dead stuff, not from the reproductive process of begetting and gestating." This concept of the cosmos as "made" and not "begotten" shaped the Christian theology of Trinity, and God's creation of the world. It demotes the cosmos to the status of a "possessed object," and distinguishes it from the divine.<sup>521</sup>

In Genesis 1, the division between rulers and workers and between leisure and labor cannot be found. God both works and rests and makes this the pattern for all humans and even for animals. There is no hierarchy of one class of humans over another in the manner validated by *Enuma Elish*. While the text leaves open the equality of male and female "in the image" of God, the maleness of the pronouns for God and for Adam already suggests that males are the appropriate collective representatives of this God, with females sharing in the benefits of corporate "human" sovereignty, but also falling under the rule of the male head of the family.<sup>522</sup> Plato believed in a hierarchy in which women and slaves were inferior. According to Plato, those who fail to control their "body and its sensations" will be reincarnated as women.<sup>523</sup>

Plato's *Timaeus* elevates the "dualism" that places the souls above the physical. Plato thinks of reality as divided between mind and body. Mind or consciousness is primal, eternal, and good whereas body or visible corporeality is secondary, derivative, and the source of evil, in the form of physical sensations to be

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<sup>521</sup> Ibid., 22-23.

<sup>522</sup> Ibid., 20-21.

<sup>523</sup> Ibid., 22-23.



mastered by the mind. This hierarchy of mind over body is duplicated in the hierarchy of male over female, human over animals, rulers over workers.<sup>524</sup> Christian cosmology inherited a “geocentric and hierarchical world picture” from Platonic tradition.<sup>525</sup> Therefore, this promotes in Christianity an inequality of bodies and status in society across gender and class hierarchy. Female subordination is explained both as “natural,” reflecting the inferiority of the female body and personality, and also as punishment for causing “original sin.”<sup>526</sup>

Christians read Genesis 1 through the eyes of Greek science reflected in Plato’s *Timaeus*. As such Christian view God is not only eternally preexisting the visible cosmos, but also creating the cosmos “out of nothing.” Neither Greek nor the Platonic stories contain this dogma of *creation ex nihilo*, since both assume some kind of chaotic “stuff” that was “there” in the beginning. In both stories, God shaped this chaotic material into the cosmos, however, the Christian theology rejected this possibility of the eternal coexistence of “matter,” since it suggests a source of being parallel to God. This challenged God’s absolute sovereignty.<sup>527</sup>

Ruether is right when she opposes the patriarchy, domination of men over women and humans over nature. She critiques the story of the killing of the Goddess Tiamat because it justifies the rise of Babylon as a military power and supports serfdom since it promoted the values that Ruether opposes, such as patriarchy, domination, and exploitation. The manner in which she reads the Genesis creation story in light of ecofeminist theology is the major ground for my rereading of the Kachin creation

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<sup>524</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>525</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>526</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>527</sup> Ibid., 26.

narrative. I incorporate Kachin traditional beliefs into Christianity to help “heal” the relationship between men and women, humans and nature. Ruether sees “Genesis 1 as a step up, since it promotes stewardship of creation, which is good for the environment. Additionally, the ancient Israelites’ heritage as former slaves led them to limit slavery or at least the slavery of Israelites,”<sup>528</sup> however, Ruether believes that the priestly author of Genesis 1 is sexist, and that he attached Genesis 2 to his own creation account in order to make clear that women were second-class to men.<sup>529</sup>

In the Kachin creation narrative, the mother is very important rather than the father. Everything and every being are not created, but are birthed “*shangai ai*” instead by the mother, *Chyunun* and *Woishun*. Leach also points out that “in the beginning there was a female-male Creator Spirit whiytch gave birth to the various elements of the universe.”<sup>530</sup> Human-like creatures and human beings are birthed by *Shanu Nem* and *Shawa Nang*. All kinds of Nats are also birthed by *Chyunun* and *Woishun*. This birthing concept relates to the language of the Goddess in Kachin creation narrative. In terms of the birthing concept, there is a connection between *Chyunun* and *Woishun* and *Karai Kasang*. *Karai Kasang* birthed everything and every being through the form of *Chyunun* and *Woishun*. Mesle points out that “if we use the model of God as parent, the process God seems to include the qualities of a mother far more than do traditional models.”<sup>531</sup> Therefore, *Karai Kasang* can be regarded as Goddess through the birthing concept in the Kachin creation narrative.

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<sup>528</sup> Ibid. 15.

<sup>529</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>530</sup> Leach, 269.

<sup>531</sup> Mesle, *Process Theology*, 81.

Kachin Christians also need to reinterpret Genesis 1:28 to live in harmony with the land. Catherine Keller also argues against the misinterpretation of Genesis 1:28: “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth” (NRSV). Keller suggests that many Christian readings of Genesis 1:28 as an anti-ecological code that justifies “our devastation of other species, to the point of not using them, but using them up—at the rate of whole populations and possibly dozens, going extinct every day.”<sup>532</sup> By reading Genesis 1:31: “God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good,” Keller argues that we human beings are not the only ones who are very good; we are just part of a very good genesis collective. I agree with Keller that “dominion in Genesis 1:28” does not mean humans are meant to exploit nature, but it reminds humans of responsibility to take care of nature. Since *Karai Kasang* is in every single aspect of nature, we humans and non-humans are relational and siblings. Keller’s words apply to the image of *Karai Kasang*, “we are invited to a *creative responsibility*—an ability to respond in appreciative relation to the others, human, and non-human.”<sup>533</sup> In this sense, process theology may help Kachin people find a more meaningful of reading Genesis 1:28 in light of ecospirituality and eco-living in their land. Because process theology is a relational theology, it has in common with ecofeminism an emphasis upon the interconnectedness of persons and humans with nature. For both, nature is valued for its diversity and subjectivity. In Whitehead’s thought, the term “person” is redefined to include animals. Thus, “all living bodies, including animals and vegetables, are societies

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<sup>532</sup> Catherine Keller, *On the Mystery: Discerning God in Process* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 65.

<sup>533</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

of actual occasions.” The sequence of these occasions is what Whitehead calls “a living person or a soul.”<sup>534</sup> Whitehead’s philosophy offers ecofeminism to see the kinship of human beings and nature, and the independence and interdependence of nature and humanity.<sup>535</sup> I see the implications of process theology’s interconnectedness further touch on deeply ecofeminist issues.

According to Ruether, ecofeminism brings together ecology and feminism. Ecofeminism seeks equality of women with men, encourages a transformation of social relations such as ownership of the means of production and reproduction, and changing cultural patterns of violence and male domination.<sup>536</sup> Ruether believes that if dominating and destructive relations to the earth are inter-related with gender, class, and racial domination, then a healed relation to the earth cannot be realized simply through technological “fixes.”<sup>537</sup> Thus, process theology’s concept of relationality of nature and humanity help ecofeminist theologies overthrow the domination of men over women and nature in the Kachin context.

#### B. Birthing *Karai Kasang* as Goddess

In the quest for the liberation of Kachin women from sufferings and struggle, it is necessary to rebirth *Karai Kasang* as the Goddess. In this section, I draw on the contributions of several important ecofeminist theologians whose insights can help shape a vision of *Karai Kasang* as Goddess. In her book, *The Body of God: An Ecological*

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<sup>534</sup> Nancy R. Howell, *A Feminist Cosmology: Ecology, Solidarity, and Metaphysics* (New York: Humanity Books, 2000), 28.

<sup>535</sup> Ibid.

<sup>536</sup> Ruether, *Gaia and God*, 2.

<sup>537</sup> Ibid.

*Theology*, Sallie McFague discusses that envisioning the universe as the body of God could help us understand how our body, its interactions with all things seen and unseen, can apply to our understanding of how God interacts with the universe. In *Gaia and God: Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing*, Rosemary Radford Ruether argues that the Western religious and scientific traditions have influenced the relationships between humans and the earth that have led to today's ecological crisis. I discuss how McFague's *The Body of God* and Ruether's *Gaia and God* could help Kachin people to birth *Karai Kasang* as Goddess. Chung Hyun Kyung, in *Struggle to be the Sun Again: Introducing Asian Women's Theology*, discusses that through her experience of *han* (painful, injustice feelings, sufferings)<sup>538</sup> in the colonial and patriarchal oppression, the Asian feminist theology originates in the struggle and the search for the liberation of the poor Asian women. In response to the traditional concepts of tyrannical and patriarchal God, Carol P. Christ argues that, in *She Who Changes: Re-Imaging the Divine in the World*, by using a feminist process theology, the female image of the divine power as Goddess/God is relational and, therefore, is non-hierarchical, non-patriarchal, and non-dualistic. I discover how Chung's feminist liberation theology and Christ's feminist process theology are connected in terms of birthing *Karai Kasang* as Goddess.

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<sup>538</sup> According to Hyun Young Hak, a Korean minjung theologian, *han* is a sense of unresolved resentment against injustice suffered, a sense of helplessness because of the overwhelming odds against, a feeling of total abandonment, a feeling of acute pain and sorrow in one's guts and bowels making the whole body writhe and wiggle, and an obstinate urge to take "revenge" and to right the wrong all these constitute. See Chung, *Struggle to be the Sun Again*, 42.

## 1. The Body of God and the Gaia

McFague's organic model grounded on the common creation story is opposed to the classic organic model. The classic organic model, for McFague, is expressed in the phrase "the Church as the Body of Christ."<sup>539</sup> McFague argues that this classic model has two critical issues. First, in its primary form within Christianity, "the Church as the Body of Christ, the model was spiritualized, excluding not only all of nature and most human beings, but also the physical aspects of life, including sex and, therefore, women." Secondly, "in its assumption that body meant one body, the male body, it was deeply conservative, at times, verging on fascism."<sup>540</sup> For McFague, the problems of the classic organic model will be solved by the contemporary organic model, which is based on the common creation story. This could provide the place for ecological unity, one in which difference stands in relation to the whole and how each part works in unison in ecology. McFague does not refer to the body as the real human body when she speaks of the universe as the body of God. She uses it as a metaphor to understand the interconnectedness and interactions between God and the world as well as between humans and nature in the universe.<sup>541</sup>

There is a connection between McFague's the body of God and Ruether's Gaia. For me, McFague's idea of universe as the body of God is similar to Ruether's idea of Gaia. Ruether suggests that in Gaia, God and ecology, and feminism are brought together in the unified perspective of ecofeminism. She writes, "the goal of this quest is earth healing, a healed relationship between men and women, between classes and nations, and

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<sup>539</sup> McFague, *The Body of God*, 30.

<sup>540</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>541</sup> Ibid., 38.

between humans and the earth.”<sup>542</sup> For Ruether, such a goal cannot be possible without the transformation of the domination of Western culture which is enshrined, in part, in Christianity.<sup>543</sup> According to Ruether, “Gaia is the word for the Greek Earth Goddess” and it means, “the entire planet is a living system, behaving as a unified organism.”<sup>544</sup> For Ruether, “Gaia is seen as a personified being, an immanent divinity” and Gaia should replace God as our focus of worship because the traditional male monotheistic God is hostile to and neglects the earth.<sup>545</sup>

Both McFague and Ruether argue that it is impossible to criticize the hierarchy of male over female without criticizing and overcoming the hierarchy of human over nature. These two relationships are the primary paradigms for oppression, and within the ecofeminist critique, they are inherently related to the language and imagery used for God. Ruether states, “ecofeminist theology and spirituality has tended to assume that the Goddess we need for ecological well-being is the reverse of the God we have had in the Semitic monotheistic traditions; immanent rather than transcendent, female rather than male identified, relational and interactive rather than dominating, pluriform and multicentered rather than uniform and monocentered.”<sup>546</sup> McFague uses a new organic model by using the common creation story to fight against the classic organic model, whereas Ruether uses ecofeminist theology to challenge the systems of hierarchy and patriarchy. Ruether states “creation stories are the blueprints of society.”<sup>547</sup> They reflect how the divine and the mortal, male and female, humans and non-humans are related to

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<sup>542</sup> Ruether, *Gaia and God*, 1.

<sup>543</sup> Ibid.

<sup>544</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>545</sup> Ibid.

<sup>546</sup> Ibid., 247.

<sup>547</sup> Ibid., 15.

each other. Ruether says, “This vision must start with a principle of equity: equity between men and women...equity between the human species and all other members to the biotic community of which we are a part; and finally equity between generations of living things, between the needs of those alive now and those who are to come.”<sup>548</sup> This shows that McFague’s process theology and Ruether’s ecofeminist theology are complementary and support each other.

Both McFague and Ruether use the language of “the body” as a metaphor to understanding the inter web of beings and things. McFague says, “...to speak of the universe as God’s body, it would not be this or that body and certainly not a human body, but all the bodies that have ever been or will ever be, from quarks, rocks, mountains, and water, but not forgetting tortoises, pine trees, buttercups, giraffes, and of course, human beings in all their various shapes, conditions, and colors.”<sup>549</sup> Like McFague, Ruether also expresses that “the material substances of our bodies live on in plants and animals, just as our own bodies are composed from minute to minute of substances that once were parts of other animals and plants...our kinship with all earth creatures is global, linking us to the whole living Gaia today.”<sup>550</sup> This demonstrates that Ruether’s ecofeminism also supports McFague’s theology of nature. McFague says, “When we begin to think of ourselves—and of God—in an ecological context, everything changes. To think of ourselves, our nature, and our role in the scheme of things from a cosmic, planetary perspective and to think of God as the One who is in, with, and under the entire process of the universe...”<sup>551</sup>

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<sup>548</sup> Ibid., 258.

<sup>549</sup> McFague, *The Body of God*, 38.

<sup>550</sup> Ruether, *Gaia and God*, 252.

<sup>551</sup> McFague, *The Body of God*, 65.



According to the Kachin creation narrative, *Ninggawn Chyunun* (*Chyu* means breast) has many breasts<sup>552</sup> and she is the mother of all living things and beings. The original term for “Kachin” is “*Chyu-rum Wunpawng sha annau ni*,” which means “brothers and sisters those who suck the same breasts.” *Karai Kasang* revealed *Herself* into the form of *Ningawng Chyunun*. This is similar to *El Shaddai*, a Hebrew word for God. *El Shaddai*, meaning “the Breasted One,” helps me to see *Karai Kasang* as “an infinite Mother” who pours forth blessings from the Breasts Above and the Womb Below.<sup>553</sup> In other words, all beings were birthed by *Karai Kasang* through *Ninggawn Chyunun*.

In terms of the birthing concept, there is a relationship between the highest being—*Karai Kasang*, and the mother of the universe—*Ninggawng Chyunun*. Here I apply McFague’s framework of seeing God’s role in the birthing concept. Sallie McFague further explains “God as mother, lover, and friend of the world.”<sup>554</sup> This is helpful in shaping *Karai Kasang* as immanent Goddess who is in the world and made known through the Nats and their interaction in the world, existing in the forests, mountains, waters, skies, and villages. Additionally, as I have mentioned, majority of the benevolent Nats are females, for examples, *Chyip Ningma* (female, represents the darkness), *Rip Sumwawp* (female, represents the heaven), *Shawa Nang* (the mother of the coming generations after *Chyunun*), *Sup Shi Majan* (the mother of all kinds of trees), *Sup Nang Majan* (the mother of all kinds of animals), *Hkrik Kahkrawp Majan*

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5. <sup>552</sup> Ja Li, *Jinghpaw a Hkap la Hkan sa Shatup Lam* (What Kachins Believe and Practice) vol. 1, 1-

<sup>553</sup> Keller, *On the Mystery*, 74.

<sup>554</sup> *Ibid.*, vii.

(the mother of all kinds of bee), *Kum Grang Majan* (the mother of iron), *Jum Majan* (the mother of salt), *Ndoi Lum Jan* (the mother of fishes) and *Nsin Majan* (female, the darkness), *Jan Hkin Neng* (female, the sun), and Ningdim Pri Neng (female, sky). We can embrace that through these benevolent female Nats, *Karai Kasang*, as spirit, can be the space where the possibility of birthing is made real. The birthing concept is, through the female/mother Nats, constantly happening at all times, from human birthing, to forest birthing, to mountain birthing. The *Karai Kasang* is the benevolent spirit, making space for the potential possibility to take place. In this sense, there is a theological necessity to describe *Karai Kasang* as female/Goddess and that is not conflicting with the process God.

In the light of *Karai Kasang* as Goddess in Kachin context, Ruether is also right when she claims that “God is seen as shaping the child in the womb, bringing it to birth, and keeping it safe throughout its development. God is the power of conception and successful birth; God is the compassionate mother who guides Israel’s footsteps. God’s motherly care extends throughout Israel’s life. It is both creational and salvific.”<sup>555</sup> *Karai Kasang*’s loving care and motherly love to creation as parallel to God’s loving care for Israel exceeds even that expected of mothers: “Can a woman forget her nursing child or show no compassion for the child of her womb? Even if these may forget, yet I will not forget you” (Isaiah 49:15).<sup>556</sup> The mixture of male and female imagery of God is strikingly illustrated in Isaiah in:

The Lord goes forth like a might man,  
Like a man of war, he stirs up his fury...  
For a long time, I have held my peace,

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<sup>555</sup> Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 56-57.

<sup>556</sup> Ibid.

I have kept still and restrained myself,  
Now I will cry out like a woman in travail,  
I will gasp and pant... (Isaiah 42:13-14, 16-17) <sup>557</sup>

To rebirth the Goddess for the Kachins, Kachin people need to accept *Karai Kasang* as a life-giving power which can be naturally personified as mother and woman because women give birth to children and family members by nurturing them. Whitehead rejects the idea of God as ruling Caesar, imperial ruler, ruthless moralist, and unmoved mover.<sup>558</sup> Discarding the dominant view of power as power over some other subject, process thought adopts power as power with another subject. God does not coerce the world but persuades the world through God's patient and loving call—which is called “divine persuasion” in process term. Cobb describes that this divine persuasion “depends on relations of respect, concern, and love, and the vision of a better future” and “is a balance between urging toward the good and maximizing the power—therefore freedom—of the one whom God seeks to persuade.”<sup>559</sup> Human beings then have the freedom in each moment of their lives to respond to God's call or not. I see this reconceptualization of God's power as compatible with Ruether's ecofeminist thought because it breaks down harmful power relations that promote the power of the one over the many.<sup>560</sup>

Thus, process theology's notion of non-patriarchal/non-hierarchical God supports Kachin ecofeminist theologies in their quest to birth Goddess. Ruether develops the term God/ess to combine both the masculine and feminine forms of the word for the divine to

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<sup>557</sup> Ibid.

<sup>558</sup> Howell, *A Feminist Cosmology*, 29.

<sup>559</sup> John B. Cobb Jr., *God and the World* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969), 90.

<sup>560</sup> Jeremy Fackenthal, “Feminism and Process theology,” in *Feminism and Religion*.  
<https://feminismandreligion.com/about/> (accessed September 6, 2018).

fight against the roots of an oppressive patriarchal male monotheism. The creation of a Goddess religion is to overcome the dualism or reverse the patriarchal religion. “The Goddess and God are equivalent, not complementary, images of the divine.”<sup>561</sup> In his response to a question of whether there is a convergence between process theology and Goddess theology, John B. Cobb Jr. mentions that process theology shares common ground with Goddess theology as it is a form of ecofeminist theology. Both process theology and Goddess theology have been critical of traditional formulations of the doctrine of God.<sup>562</sup> For Cobb, “both insist that the stereotypically male attributes of God are not appropriate in terms of stereotypical attributes, God is more feminine than masculine. But most prefer to emphasize that gender simply does not apply to God.”<sup>563</sup> However, even if Goddess theologians may agree that God is neither male nor female, they affirm that the appropriate imagery and language for deity is feminine because imagery is more important than conceptuality for ecofeminist theology.<sup>564</sup> As I have discussed, many process theologians view of the image of God is much closer to the feminine images and values. Process thought cannot only support but also clarify and strengthen Kachin ecofeminist theology to affirm the birthing of *Karai Kasang* as Goddess.

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<sup>561</sup> Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 52.

<sup>562</sup> John B. Cobb Jr., “Goddess Theology: Is there a convergence between process theology and Goddess theology? What common ground do they share?” in *Process and Faith*, <http://oldsite.processandfaith.org/writings/ask-dr-cobb/2005-08/goddess-theology>. (accessed February 13, 2019).

<sup>563</sup> Ibid.

<sup>564</sup> Ibid.

## 2. Goddess/God as She-Her/He-Him

*Karai Kasang* as Goddess can also be called male and female metaphors. *Karai Kasang* is imagined as feminine but can be gender-neutral. *Karai Kasang* as Goddess can also be called male and female metaphors. Thus, God and Goddess are equivalent images of the divine.<sup>565</sup> To rebirth *Karai Kasang* as Goddess is to affirm that divinity is one to transcend the patriarchal limitations and is, therefore, “to reverse the patriarchal religion.”<sup>566</sup>

Both Chung and Christ define the divine power as both male and female to break down the patriarchal image of God. Chung argues that the God that Asian women are looking for is not the God of the colonizers and the God of the male dominant institutional church, but the God who is always present among the Asian women and feels their tears and weeps with their pains.<sup>567</sup> For Chung, God is both female and male: Asian women are yearning for the inclusive image of God who has both male and female sides to promote equality and harmony between men and women.<sup>568</sup> Chung expresses the *han* of Asian women through songs and poems: “You are a girl, a misery, a drudgery...house and housework is your good fortune, keep your place, before I’m too violent...Man is God, God is Man, you are a woman, woman, woman...in the name of your father, your husband and your son, be obedient, be respectful...”<sup>569</sup> Chung asks that what does it mean to be fully human for Asian women? For her, Asian women are struggling to fight against meaningless suffering in order to survive as human beings with

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<sup>565</sup> Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 52.

<sup>566</sup> Ibid.

<sup>567</sup> Chung, *Struggle to be the Sun Again*, 22-23.

<sup>568</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>569</sup> Ibid., 36-37.

dignity and integrity under a male-dominated society. She further expresses that many Asian parents only want a son. They pray to the gods and goddesses asking to have a son, not a daughter. Asian women have to fight against the “death-wishes” from birth to death.<sup>570</sup>

I totally agree with Chung because I myself have been through that kind of experience when my daughter was born. November 6, 2008 was the happiest moment for my wife and myself in having a special gift from God. It was the day that our lovely daughter was born. The gender of our child was not important to either my wife or myself, yet our friends visiting us at the hospital kept asking: “Is it a boy or a girl?” “A beautiful girl.” Suddenly, their faces showed their dismay unpleasantly and encouraged me by saying, “Oh sorry, but don’t worry, next time it will be a son. Just pray to God for a son.” Unquestionably, they would have said, “How Lucky! Bravo!” if our baby had been a boy. Women are devalued and treated unjustly since they were born in our Kachin community of Myanmar.

Like Chung, Christ attempts to reconstruct the transcendence-immanence, the panentheism, and non-dualism of “Goddess/God” in order to liberate women from the influences of patriarchal and hierarchal systems of culture and Christianity. Christ explores the divine power as “Goddess/God” to emphasize that divinity is inclusively both male and female.<sup>571</sup> Christ challenges “the six common theological mistakes of classical theism, such as God is perfect and therefore unchangeable, omnipotence,

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<sup>570</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>571</sup> Christ, *She Who Changes*, 17.

omniscience, God's unsympathetic goodness, immortality as a career after death, and revelation as infallible."<sup>572</sup>

Christ draws almost exclusively on process thought as developed by Charles Hartshorne. Hartshorne's primary theological goal was to overcome a number of "mistakes" he saw in classical Western theology. Instead of the distant, indifferent, judgmental God configured by Western monotheisms, Hartshorne posits a God that can truly love the world because that God is experientially connected with the world. Christ follows Hartshorne's lead, demonstrating how a world-contingent Goddess/God would fulfill feminist spiritual values such as relationality. Christ uses a feminist process theology in which the female image of the divine power as Goddess/God is relational and therefore is non-hierarchical, non-patriarchal, and non-dualistic. Christ's concept of Goddess/God as "He-She/Him-Her" promotes the importance of a birthing Goddess/God. In the Kachin creation narrative, according to Ja Li, *Ninggawn Chyunun* (mother) and *Hpunggam Woishun* (father) are not two, but *one* and cannot be separable.<sup>573</sup> Thus *Karai Kasang*, through the form of *Chyunun* and *Woishun*, contains both the feminine and masculine characteristics. This offers Kachin people see *Karai Kasang* as "He-She/Him-Her." Christ strongly argues that God is not male. She refers to divine power as "Goddess/God" in order to emphasize that the divinity is definitely not to be constructed as exclusively male.<sup>574</sup> God is not omnipotent because of the freedom of beings, but the power of Goddess/God is power with or the persuasive power.<sup>575</sup> I consider that Christ's

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<sup>572</sup> Ibid., 33. See more in Charles Hartshorne, *Omnipotence and Other Theological Mistakes* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984).

<sup>573</sup> Ja Li, *Jinghpaw a Hkap la Hkan sa Shatup Lam* (What Kachins Believe and Practice) vol. 1, 1.

<sup>574</sup> Christ, *She Who Changes*, 16-17.

<sup>575</sup> Ibid., 36-37.

argument of the six common theological mistakes is more than enough to break down the wall of hierarchical and patriarchal God.

Christ's concept of Goddess/God as "He-She/Him-Her" and Chung Hyun's proposal of God as neutral gender promote the importance of a birthing Goddess/God. Both strongly argue that God is not male. Both refer to divine power as "Goddess/God" in order to emphasize that the divinity is definitely not to be constructed as exclusively male. Both Chung and Christ express the power of God as persuasive power or the power of love rather than coercive power. Who is Jesus for Asian women? Chung asserts that many Asian women portray Jesus with female images of mother or woman Messiah, and shaman/a priest of *han*. Chung also proposes some major theological themes, which empower Asian women in their struggle to be the sun again. First, "God as community:" The image of God as community helps Asian women to get out of their box of individualism. Secondly, "God as Creator in Nature and in History:" Asian women are searching for the God of history who is with the oppressed people in their struggle for justice, peace, and the integrity of creation.<sup>576</sup> Thirdly, "God as life-giving Spirit:" Asian women emphasize the immanence of God who is *within* everywhere and *in* everything; "who is present everywhere and moves everywhere." Fourth, "God as Mother and Woman:" many Asian writings portray God as mother and woman, who has life-giving power and gives birth to her children.<sup>577</sup> God as mother, for Chung is, therefore, more approachable and personable and for a deity who is "growing, changing, and walking" with the people.<sup>578</sup>

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<sup>576</sup> Chung, *Struggle to be the Sun Again*, 49.

<sup>577</sup> Ibid., 49-50.

<sup>578</sup> Ibid., 51.



We can see that how Chung's feminist liberation theology is well-matched with the feminist process theology of Christ. If God were all-powerful, why could not God stop the sufferings or discrimination against women in the hands of men if God is all-powerful? If God is so good, why does God allow men to dominate, abuse, rape, and murder women in many cultures in the world?<sup>579</sup> Christ responds that the power of Goddess/God is not "power over (domination)," but "power with (cooperation, partnership, and mutuality)." She explains, "the power of Goddess/God is like the love of a mother, influencing, but sympathetic to and hence influenced by, her child and delighting in its growing creativity and freedom."<sup>580</sup> I realize that Christ's ideas of the power of Goddess/God as "power with" is very much aligned with Chung's concept of God as mother and woman whose love is cooperative and a mutual relationship.

It is no doubt that classical Christian theology inherited the extreme doctrine of transcendence—God is the one, ultimate metaphysical fact, absolute and underivative, and who decreed and ordered the actual world. This concept leaves God completely outside metaphysical rationalization. Consequently, many Christians came to see God as absolute and as a wholly other, who is always watching over the world from Heaven. Both Chung and Christ deny such an extreme doctrine of God as the absolute controller. The process views of God as omnipresent allows people to see God as both transcendent and immanent—God works in the world by continual and universal self-revelation. Every being and thing in every moment is experiencing God as the ground of both order and freedom. The classical Christian theology describes God as omnipotent, that is, one who has absolute supernatural power to control all beings and things. God is all-powerful, and

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<sup>579</sup> Christ, *She Who Changes*, 95.

<sup>580</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.

predestines from birth to death, even life after death, of humans and of all creatures. But, process God lives in love, patience, and not in force. Whitehead asserts, “God’s role is not the combat of productive force with productive force, of destructive force with destructive force; it lies in the patient operation of the overpowering rationality of his conceptual harmonization.”<sup>581</sup> Both Chung and Christ claim that the power of Goddess is the power of love. This matches Whitehead’s God. The love of God is affected by the world as we are affected by God’s love. In this sense, Goddess has no supernatural power to control the world.

Both Chung and Christ argue that the traditional God is very unilateral and does not make sense to women’s struggling for liberation. However, I think that Asian feminist theology will become more empowering if Chung could apply the process theology’s concept of “panentheism,” in her understanding of the transcendence-immanence of the divine power. Here, I apply Christ’s idea that “God sympathetically feels the feelings of every creature and the world”<sup>582</sup> to Chung’s Goddess. This resembles Whitehead’s phrase, “God is the great companion—the fellow-sufferer who understands,”<sup>583</sup> which could help Asian women understand Goddess as the image of the divine power and is not only a co-sufferer, but also the co-healer for all women around the world.

Regarding women’s liberation, process theology is very helpful for understanding the nature and power of “Goddess” in both Western and Asian contexts. I believe that process theology could also be a bridge between the Western feminist theology and Asian

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<sup>581</sup> Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 346.

<sup>582</sup> Christ, *She Who Changes*, 66.

<sup>583</sup> Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 351.

feminist theology. Both Chung and Christ claim that Goddess is transcendent, but not in the radical way envisioned by traditional theism. Goddess is a combination of transcendence and immanence, novelty and order, conceptualization and actualization. Christ explores the deeper meaning of female images of divine power from the process feminist perspective, including Goddess.

I use process theology's panentheism to portray Goddess in Chung's Asian image of Goddess, who is *in* the world and the world is also *in* Goddess. Chung's idea of Godhead as mother/woman/life-giving spirit is associated with the concept of panentheism. Through mother, woman, and life-giving spirit, Asian women could feel that Goddess is always *in* them and together *with* them. In the quest for liberation of Asian women from suffering and struggle, it is, therefore, necessary to consider the Goddess as panentheistic. A panentheistic Goddess allows us to take the idea of immanence seriously while preserving the idea of transcendence. In this worldview, there is no Goddess elsewhere, but rather, a Goddess everywhere, the all-encompassing Goddess. Thus, I find that Christ's feminist process concept of Goddess/God as panentheistic is relevant to apply in Kachin context to liberate the *han* of Kachin women.

I see not only differences but also similarities between Chung and Christ. Chung's feminist liberation theology is rooted in the suffering of the Asian grassroots while Christ's feminist theology is based on the process philosophy. Chung is more practical (experiential) whereas Christ is more philosophical (speculative). Chung's theological setting is in Asia, particularly in South Korea, whereas Christ's theology focuses on a Western context. Chung syncretizes Christianity with indigenous religion of Korea while Christ integrates goddess theology with process philosophy. However, regardless of their

differences, both Chung and Christ emphasize fighting against the hierarchical and patriarchal systems. Chung also articulates:

Woman's body grows and changes radically through menstruation and pregnancy compared to the male body. God as mother is more approachable and personable. When Asian women begin to imagine God as woman and mother, they also accept their own bodies and their own woman-hood in its fullness. The female God accepts us as we are more than the patriarchal male God.<sup>584</sup>

They both explore the concepts of Goddess—Chung describes God as the *Shaman*, the priest of *han* and Christ reveals the divine power as the image of Goddess. Even though Chung does not mention anything about process thought, her notion of God is compatible with the process God.

Concerning the understanding of God, a majority of Christians have been shaped by the classical Christian view of God—God is omnipotent, dualistic, hierarchical, only transcendent, and patriarchal. Such a classical Christian view of unilateral power of God is challenged by the process view of relational power of God—God is relational, non-hierarchical, non-dualistic, and transcendent-immanent. I discussed above how the process views of a relational power of God could help both Asian and Western women to see God as a relational Goddess/God—God as neutral gender (He/She, Him/Her), Goddess as persuasive rather than coercive, and the panentheistic Goddess. Integrating Chung's feminist liberation theology with Christ's process-relational feminist theology, a relevant Kachin feminist theology could potentially be developed.

It is necessary to rebirth *Karai Kasang* as the Goddess for the liberation of Kachin women from sufferings and struggle. Chung's ideas of the God-head as female and female goddesses are relevant to apply *Karai Kasang* as Goddess in the Kachin context.

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<sup>584</sup> Chung, *Struggle to be the Sun Again*, 51.

She claims that “many Asian women think of God as having both female and male qualities in the God-self. It is natural for Asian women to think of the God-head as male and female because there are many male gods and female goddesses in Asian religious cultures.”<sup>585</sup> I agree with Padma Gallup’s proposal that Asian feminist theology should draw its sources from its own millennia-old culture.<sup>586</sup> Therefore, the Kachin people need to draw their sources for promoting *Karai Kasang* as the Goddess from their own indigenous or millennia-old culture.

One way to do this is with the language of the Goddess, in which the female body is an important metaphor for the creative powers of the earth body. The Goddess as “Giver of Life” is more accurately called Creatress, since she gives birth to plants and animals as well as human children.<sup>587</sup> This is relevant to the Kachin context because the functions of Nats provide a connection to see *Karai Kasang* as the Giver of Life or Goddess.

Starhawk’s idea of the Goddess’s power as immanence also applies to *Karai Kasang* as immanent Goddess. She writes:

Earth-based spirituality is rooted in three basic concepts that I call immanence, interconnectedness, and community. The first—immanence—name our primary understanding that the Earth, Goddess, God—whatever you call it—is not found outside the world somewhere—it’s in the world: it is the world, and it is us.<sup>588</sup>

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<sup>585</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>586</sup> Ibid.

<sup>587</sup> Carol P. Christ, *Rebirth of the Goddess: Finding Meaning in Feminist Spirituality* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 91.

<sup>588</sup> Ibid., 103. Cf., Starhawk, “Power, Authority, and Mystery: Ecofeminism and Earth-based Spirituality,” in *Reweaving the World: The Emergence of Ecofeminism*, ed., Irene Diamond and Gloria Feman Orenstein (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1990), 73.

In this sense, process theology is very helpful for understanding the nature and power of *Karai Kasang* as the “Goddess.” Christ’s own theology contributes to the positive vision of a joyous world that she advocates. She has opened the way for a feminist appropriation of process thought as a tool for advancing that vision. My own feminist-process theology employs many of Christ’s insights and the same philosophical system in the same direction.

All things and beings, from Nats to humanity, depend upon the immanence of the *Karai Kasang*. As in Romans 1:20 (NRSV), “Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made. So, they are without excuse,” *Karai Kasang* is present in all things by virtue of having been created. The image of *Karai Kasang* in creation depends upon humanity, and the image of *Karai Kasang* in humanity also depends upon creation.<sup>589</sup> These connections, for the Kachin people, provide a worldview and ethics for the land in which they live. They both respect and fear the land because it protects them from the dangers of storms and sickness.

As discussed above, according to the Kachin creation narrative, the Kachins have only the “birth concept” rather than the “creation concept.” Everything and every being are not created, but rather are birthed by the mother, *Ninggawn Chyunun*. Human-like creatures and human beings are birthed by *Shanu Nem*. That is why in Kachin language, feminine terms are always named before masculine terms. For example, nu/wa (mother/father), num/la (female/male), shayi/shadang (girl/boy), ayi/ala

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<sup>589</sup> Ioanna Sahinidou, “Ecofeminist Theologies Challenge Domination,” *Open Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 7 no. 3 (2017), 257. <https://doi.org/10.4236/ojpp.2017.73015> (accessed September 26, 2018).

(femininity/masculinity). The Kachins never say male/masculine first. The feminine terms are always used to refer to the land and country—*nu mungdan* (mother land/country), we never say *wa mungdan* (father land/country). Thus, the original concept of *Karai Kasang* is not father—*Wa Karai Kasang* it is “Mother”—*Nu Karai Kasang*. All these are the theological resources that we need to revitalize to comprehend *Karai Kasang* as Universal Mother—*Ninggawn Chyunun* for birthing the Goddess in today’s Kachin society.

### 3. *Karai Kasang* as the Goddess of *Prakriti* and *Shakti*

As Kachin ecofeminist theology is enlarged to a consideration of religious pluralism when it takes up to birth *Karai Kasang* as Goddess, I also utilize ecofeminist theology within a more progressive Christian and non-Christian frameworks. In this section, I discuss how the Goddess Durga as *Prakriti* and *Shakti* can help Kachin people search non-patriarchal, non-hierarchical, and non-dualistic God in light of birthing the Kachin Goddess in Myanmar. I discover how Hindu concept of Goddess Durga can deepen the radical understanding of *Karai Kasang* as Goddess for the Kachin people. I also explore the complementary connection between Goddess Durga and *Karai Kasang* in terms of transcendence-immanence, panentheism, and female power/energy.

One of the most impressive and formidable Hindu goddesses is the Goddess Durga. Goddess Durga’s primary mythological function is to fight demons, who threaten the stability of the cosmos. That is why she is well known as the “Warrior Goddess.”<sup>590</sup> Durga is “the goddess of power and strength, the most important goddess of the Hindus.

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<sup>590</sup> David R. Kingsley, *Hindu Goddesses: Visions of the Divine Feminine in Hindu Religious Traditions* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 95.

She is a multi-dimensional Goddess, with many names, many personas, and many facets.”<sup>591</sup> According to Shri Gyan Rajhans, the word “Durga” in Sanskrit means “a fort, or a place, which is difficult to overrun.” Another meaning of “Durga” is “*Durgatinashini*,” which literally translates into “the one who eliminates sufferings.”<sup>592</sup> Goddess Durga protects her devotees from the evils of the world and at the same time removes their miseries. There are many incarnations of Durga, such as Kali, Bhagvati, Bhavani, Ambika, Lalita, Gauri, Kandalini, Java, Rajeswari, and so on.<sup>593</sup> According to Laura Amazzone, although Durga has many names and forms, “Durga means the invincible, unconquerable, and unassailable one.” Durga comes to help people calmly face their fears and difficulties. She is a liberator of the oppressed and marginalized. By nature, Durga is not a warring Goddess. She comes because people need her help. In this sense, her name also means “fortress,” which people need to carry within themselves and can call upon when they need their emotional, physical, mental, and spiritual boundaries.<sup>594</sup>

In his book, *Encountering the Goddess: A Translation of the Devi-Mahatmya and a Study of Its Interpretation*, Thomas B. Coburn provides the origin of the Goddess Durga. Coburn describes the fierce battle between the Goddess Durga and the Mahishasura, the great buffalo demon and the Goddess Durga and the two demon brothers, Shumbha and Nishumbha. Goddess Durga is the Goddess of the power of the

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<sup>591</sup> Madhuri Guin, “Goddess Durga: The Female Form as the Supreme Being” <http://www.dollsofindia.com/library/Durga/> (accessed September 26, 2018).

<sup>592</sup> Shri Gyan Rajhans, “Goddess Durga: The Mother Goddess & Her Symbolism,” <http://hinduism.about.com/od/hindugoddesses/a/Durga.htm> (accessed September 26, 2018).

<sup>593</sup> Ibid.

<sup>594</sup> Laura Amazzone, *Goddess Durga and Sacred Female Power* (Lanham: Hamilton Books, 2010),



Supreme Being that preserves moral order and righteousness in the universe.<sup>595</sup> By reading about this myth, I realize that the Goddess Durga is the most important goddess of the Hindus. She is a multi-dimensional Goddess, who has many names, many personas, and many facets. For example, as Kali (she turns black as night and is omnipotent, terrible in rage and fury), as Parvati (she is serene, the pretty consort of Lord Shiva by his side), as Bhawani (symbol of life), as Sati (the object of death), as Basanti (the herald of springtime), as Ambika (Mother), and so on.<sup>596</sup> So, Durga is present everywhere. This reminds me of Goddess Durga as both the Goddess of transcendence and immanence.

According to this *Devi-Mahatmya*, the Goddess Durga was born from the rays of the splendor of the male gods. The male gods then gifted the goddess with their weapons and other divine objects to help her in her battle with the demon, *Mahishasura*. Finally, Durga wielded her bright sword, beheading Mahishasura and also defeated Shumbha and Nisumbha. Male gods created the Goddess Durga and also gave her weapons.<sup>597</sup> *Devi Mahatmya* describes Durga as “the Mother God and the Great Warrior-Goddess.” The *Devi Mahatmya* “dwells at length upon the battles of Durga against demonic forces.”<sup>598</sup> Durga is portrayed as having eight or ten hands—moving in eight or ten directions. This suggests that Durga protects her devotees from all directions. Durga is also signified as the three-eyed Goddess.<sup>599</sup> Shri Gyan Rajhans explains, “her left eye represents desire

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<sup>595</sup> Thomas B. Coburn, *Encountering the Goddess: A Translation of the Devi-Mahatmya and a Study of Its Interpretation* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1991).

<sup>596</sup> Madhuri Guin, “Goddess Durga: The Female Form as the Supreme Being” <http://www.dollsofindia.com/library/Durga/> (accessed September 26, 2018).

<sup>597</sup> Ibid.

<sup>598</sup> Chapel of Our Mother God, “Durga: The Vikhelic Return of Our Mother God,” <http://www.mother-god.com/Durga.html> (accessed September 26, 2018).

<sup>599</sup> Shri Gyan Rajhans, “Goddess Durga: The Mother Goddess & Her Symbolism,” <http://hinduism.about.com/od/hindugoddesses/a/Durga.htm> (accessed September 26, 2018).

symbolized by the moon; her right eye represents action symbolized by the sun, and her middle eye stands for knowledge symbolized by fire. Durga is frequently depicted standing atop or riding a tiger or lion, which represents power, will, and determination. In riding this fearsome beast, Durga symbolizes her mastery over all these qualities.”<sup>600</sup>

It is true to say that all the powers given to her by the male gods are originally her *Shakti* (power/energy/the creative force). Needless to say, I realize that Goddess Durga is the overcoming of evil. She is the symbol of overcoming evil with good. By reading this epic story of *Devi-Mahatmya*, I claim that the highest personification of God, the supreme energy, is to be feminine in Hinduism. This conceptualizes that the supreme form of Divinity is to be a woman.

As I mentioned above, there are many similarities or common ground between *Karai Kasang* and the Goddess Durga. Like the Goddess Durga, the Kachin concept of God is transcendent-immanent, who empowers and exists and is within the whole of creation. *Karai Kasang* is non-patriarchal. I find that both *Karai Kasang* and Durga are panentheistic. David Kinsley asserts that Durga as a *Prakriti* is associated with the physical world, the world she creates, sustains, and protects in her various forms. The *Devi-Mahatmya* also mentions many times that Goddess Durga is the world and everything in it. Durga is the foundation of all creatures and nourishes all creatures. As the embodiment of the earth, Durga supports, protects, and mothers all beings.<sup>601</sup> Kinsley clarifies, “as immanent in the world, Durga is equated with the earth. As transcendent,

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<sup>600</sup> Ibid.

<sup>601</sup> Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses*, 105.

she is the heavenly queen who descends from time to time to maintain harmony on earth.”<sup>602</sup>

There is a complementary connection between *Karai Kasang* and the Goddess Durga in terms of *Shakti*, the female power or energy. Like the Goddess Durga, we can also identify *Karai Kasang* as the Goddess and *Shakti*. *Shakti* means “power, force, and feminine energy, for she represents the primal creative principle underlying cosmos. She is the energizing force of all divinity, of every being and everything else. The whole universe is the manifestations of *Shakti*.”<sup>603</sup> According to Kinsley, *Shakti* is the underlying power of the divine, the aspect of the divine that permits and provokes creative activity. *Shakti* is always understood as a positive force and usually personified as a goddess. Without *Shakti*, therefore, a male counterpart god is ineffective, weak, and immobilized.<sup>604</sup> Kinsley claims that Durga is identical with or associated with *Shakti*.<sup>605</sup> Theologically, the Goddess Durga, or *Shakti*, in one form or another is equal or superior to a male god.<sup>606</sup>

Goddess Durga is “the mother of the universe and believed to be the power behind the work of creation, preservation, and destruction of the world.”<sup>607</sup> Durga, through all her forms, encompasses the essence of salvation and sacrifice. She is the *mother* of bounty and wealth, beauty and knowledge.<sup>608</sup> In this sense, Goddess Durga

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<sup>602</sup> Ibid., 105.

<sup>603</sup> Mookerjee, *Kali: The Feminine Force* (New York: Destiny Books, 1988), 11.

<sup>604</sup> Ibid., 104.

<sup>605</sup> Ibid.

<sup>606</sup> David Kinsley, *Tantric Visions of the Divine Feminine: The Ten Mahavidyas* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 246.

<sup>607</sup> Shri Gyan Rajhans, “Goddess Durga: The Mother Goddess & Her Symbolism,” <http://hinduism.about.com/od/hindugoddesses/a/Durga.htm> (accessed September 26, 2018).

<sup>608</sup> Madhuri Guin, “Goddess Durga: The Female Form as the Supreme Being” <http://www.dollsofindia.com/library/Durga/> (accessed September 26, 2018).

symbolizes the Divine forces (positive energy) that is used against the negative forces of evil and wickedness. Thus, people call “*Maa Durga*,” the Universal Mother, and ask her to use her destructive power to remove the evils within human beings (anger, selfish desires, greed, ego, and undue attachments), imperfections, faults, and to purify us to become a receptacle of her Divine Shakti.<sup>609</sup> Laura Amazzone also describes that “Durga is the Great Mother Goddess, who presides over the seasons of life, death, and birth. Goddess Durga herself embodies the paradoxes of our every existence. She is both Warrior Goddess and Divine Mother, both Death Bringer and Creator.”<sup>610</sup> This concept of Goddess Durga as Universal Mother or Divine Mother could help the Kachin people to understand their *Karai Kasang* as Universal Mother.

### C. Toward an Ecocentric Spirituality

To reconstruct the Kachin Christian concept of ecology in today’s Myanmar, it is crucial to dialogue between the Nat worship and the Jain concept of *ahimsa* in light of ecocentric spirituality. I connect these two non-Christian religious traditions—Nat worship and Jain concept of *ahimsa* to emphasize their ability to adapt in the Kachin Christian context. How could Kachin Nat worship be integrated with Christianity and Jainism in developing an ecocentric spirituality of justice and earth healing in today’s Kachin land? In this chapter, I search for theological answers to find out the connections between the concept of Nat worship and ecotheology and the Jain concept of *ahimsa* and ecotheology. Then, I articulate how the Kachin concept of Nat worship and the Jain

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<sup>609</sup> Satya Kalra, “What Does Goddess Durga Symbolize?” <https://www.indiacurrents.com/articles/2012/10/18/what-does-goddess-Durga-symbolize> (accessed September 26, 2018).

<sup>610</sup> Amazzone, *Goddess Durga and Sacred Female Power*, 3-4.

doctrine of *ahimsa* are *complementary* and *relational* in terms of empathy and care for the whole of creation to enrich the “ecocentric spirituality” in today’s Kachin context.

In Jainism, *Anekantavada* and *ahimsa* go together, “like two legs of a human being.”<sup>611</sup> The roots of *ahimsa* are found in the philosophy of *Anekantavada*. Anne Valley affirms that Jainism embraces the philosophy of *Anekantavada* as staunchly as it espouses the righteousness of *ahimsa*. *Anekantavada* and *ahimsa* are customarily discussed in terms of how each presupposes the other. The acceptance of the partiality of knowledge is an expression of *ahimsa*; and a commitment to *ahimsa* necessitates a pluralistic outlook.<sup>612</sup> *Anekantavada* is, therefore, considered to be to a non-violent way-of-knowing and it is considered to be an intrinsic element of the ethic of *ahimsa*.<sup>613</sup>

“*Ahimsa*” is the central ethical virtue of Jainism. The word *ahimsa* is originally a combination of “*a*,” non, and “*himsa*,” violence,<sup>614</sup> doing or wishing harm to another. Thus, “*ahimsa*” means “nonviolence,” the absence of even the desire to do harm to any living being and nonviolence in thought, word, and deed.<sup>615</sup> It is one of the five basic moral principles or vows, “*anuvratas*” of Jainism: Nonviolence (*ahimsa*), Truthfulness (*satya*), Non-stealing (*asteya*), Sexual chastity (*brahmacarya*), and Non-attachment (*aparigraha*).<sup>616</sup>

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<sup>611</sup> Satish Kumar, “Nonviolence for All,” in *Ahimsa, Anekanta and Jainism*, ed. Tara Sethia (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 2004), 71.

<sup>612</sup> Anne Valley, “Anekanta, Ahimsa and the Question of Pluralism,” in *Ahimsa, Anekanta and Jainism*, ed. Tara Sethia (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 2004), 99.

<sup>613</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

<sup>614</sup> L. M. Singhvi, “Appendix: The Jain Declaration on Nature,” in *Jainism and Ecology: Nonviolence in the Web of Life*, Christopher Key Chapple, ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 220.

<sup>615</sup> Jeffery D. Long, *Jainism: An Introduction* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2009), 193, 197.

<sup>616</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.

According to Jeffery D. Long, “the Jain ethos of *ahimsa* is a direct outcome of Jain *karma* theory. The passions that attract *karma* of the worst kind—*karma* whose fruition leads to the greatest suffering—are those associated with violence.”<sup>617</sup> For Long, thus, practicing *ahimsa* is to do no harm to any living things, either deliberately or through one’s carelessness.<sup>618</sup> Long further tries to assert the different practices between lay Jains and ascetic practitioners. For the ascetic, the chief task is the practice of absolute *ahimsa*, and for the layperson, there is an understanding that such a total renunciation is both impossible and undesirable.<sup>619</sup> It is very difficult to avoid doing harm to other living beings. Eating, digesting food, breathing, sitting, and moving about involve destruction of microscopic organisms.<sup>620</sup>

Long argues that “once one is aware of the existence of tiny life forms in the air one breathes and in the water one drinks, one becomes responsible for the harm that one does... Jain teaches that the actual consequences of action are always a major factor.”<sup>621</sup> For a Jain layperson, *ahimsa* means being as nonviolent as possible while still pursuing a livelihood and being involved in the normal duties of a householder.<sup>622</sup> One does not willfully or deliberately take the life of any being. This is not simply a matter of behavior, but of cultivating an attitude of harmlessness toward all living things.<sup>623</sup> Long claims that *ahimsa* is rooted in fact that reality is *Anekantavada* and thus amenable to multiple, non-exclusive perspectives, and that *ahimsa* is an essential component of the Jain path of

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<sup>617</sup> Ibid., 97.

<sup>618</sup> Ibid.

<sup>619</sup> Ibid., 98.

<sup>620</sup> Ibid., 100.

<sup>621</sup> Ibid.

<sup>622</sup> Ibid., 102.

<sup>623</sup> Ibid., 103-104.

liberation.<sup>624</sup> Paul Dundas also supports that Jainism has an innate sense of tolerance for other religious paths, based on its philosophy of *Anekantavada*. Such a tolerance is considered a reflex of the religion's deep preoccupation with *ahimsa*.<sup>625</sup>

Padmanabh S. Jaini points out that total avoidance of such *himsa* actions is impossible for a householder and he makes a distinction between injurious activities, which are totally forbidden, and those that may be tolerated within strict guidelines.<sup>626</sup> The first category is *samkalpaja-himsa*, which includes all deeds involving intentional, premeditated violence. Such deeds are contrasted with those of the *arambhaja-himsa*, which either occur accidentally or may result from the performance of an acceptable occupation. For example, a murderer clearly sets out to end the life of his/her victim, hence commits *samkalpaja-himsa*. However, surgeons may cause pain or even death during a delicate operation but are guilty only of the much less serious *arambhaja-himsa*.<sup>627</sup> Jainas have considered even killing, when done in self-defense or during a purely defensive war, to not involve *samkalpaja-himsa*, but a less serious variety called *virodhi-himsa*, injury generated by standing in opposition.<sup>628</sup>

In his article, "The Jain Worldview and Ecology," Nathmal Tatia asserts that "*ahimsa* is the remedy of all miseries, sufferings, and cruelties of life."<sup>629</sup> He further claims that "all beings are fond of life, they like survival; life is dear to all... Restrain yourself, and you will be emancipated from suffering. The violent person is one who is

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<sup>624</sup> Ibid., 154.

<sup>625</sup> Paul Dundas, "Beyond Anekantavada: A Jain Approach to Religious Tolerance," in *Ahimsa, Anekanta and Jainism*, ed. Tara Sethia (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 2004), 124-125.

<sup>626</sup> Padmanabh S. Jaini, *The Jain Path of Purification* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1998), 170.

<sup>627</sup> Ibid., 171.

<sup>628</sup> Ibid.

<sup>629</sup> Nathmal Tatia, "The Jain Worldview and Ecology," in *Jainism and Ecology: Nonviolence in the Web of Life*, ed. Christopher Key Chapple (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 6.

unmindful of and addicted to worldly pleasures.”<sup>630</sup> In this sense, the Jain, as a believer in the life of plants and particles of earth, water, air, and fire or energy, is very scrupulous about vegetarianism.<sup>631</sup> *Ahimsa* is also very important to help heal the ecological crisis and environmental spirituality. John E. Cort, in “Green Jainism?” comments that the thrice threefold of the observance of *ahimsa* are found in the vows (*mahavratas*). First, the practice of *ahimsa* involves mind, body, and speech, and consequently is a matter of intention as much as action. Secondly, it involves what we think, do, and say, but also what we have others think, do, and say. Thirdly, a Jain is expected to observe *ahimsa* in the past, present, and future.<sup>632</sup> This shows that *ahimsa* is not merely a matter of not harming one’s fellow human beings, but are also the very essential prerequisites of life, such as the air, water, and plants, which serve as the abodes of countless souls.<sup>633</sup>

Jain concept of *ahimsa* is also related to the doctrine of *jiva* (soul). According to Jainism, *jiva* is the most important ontological category of all. All living things and beings, such as insects, gods, hell-beings, animals and human beings, plants, earth, air, water, and fire-bodies, have their own *jiva*.<sup>634</sup> Chapple also claims that “each living being houses a life force or *jiva*, that occupies and enlivens the host environment. When the body dies, the *jiva* seeks out a new site depending upon the proclivities of *karma*

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<sup>630</sup> Ibid.

<sup>631</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>632</sup> John E. Cort, “Green Jainism? Notes and Queries toward a Possible Jain Environmental Ethic,” in *Jainism and Ecology: Nonviolence in the Web of Life*, ed. Christopher Key Chapple (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 74.

<sup>633</sup> Ibid., 74-75.

<sup>634</sup> Paul Dundas, *The Jains* (London: Routledge, 2002), 93-95.



generated and accrued during the previous lifetime... Each *jiva* is said to contain consciousness, energy, and bliss.”<sup>635</sup>

*Ahimsa* is a principle to teach and practice to both human beings and all of nature. It refers not only to visible physical acts of violence, but also to violence in the hearts and minds of humans, their lack of concern and compassion for their fellow humans and to the natural world.<sup>636</sup> *Ahimsa*, therefore, is profoundly ecological,<sup>637</sup> and it is the basic and pivotal moral principle for human beings to build up a holistic environmental protection, peace, and harmony in the world.

In this regard, the Kachin concept of Nat worship and the Jain concept of *ahimsa* fit well with the context of the Kachin people in Myanmar. The key to both Nat worship and *ahimsa* is the realization that we human beings are not the center of creation, that life is much bigger than our individual failures and successes, and that our nobility as a species is contingent on us relating rightly from a position of responsible dependence within the biosphere. Then, unconditional love, grace or abundant life may begin to fill the Earth, for grace is that which is ultimately life-giving allowing and enabling us to be who we really are. Observing how religious environmental practices often draw on concepts of grace, Willis Jenkins maps “the way Christian environmental strategies draw from traditions of salvation as they engage the problems of environmental ethics. The strategies of *ecojustice*, *stewardship*, and *ecological spirituality* make environments

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<sup>635</sup> Christopher Key Chapple, “The Living Earth of Jainism and the New Story: Rediscovering and Reclaiming a Functional Cosmology,” in *Jainism and Ecology: Nonviolence in the Web of Life*, ed. Christopher Key Chapple (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 220.

<sup>636</sup> Singhvi, “Appendix: The Jain Declaration on Nature,” 218-219.

<sup>637</sup> *Ibid.*, 223.

matter for Christian experience by drawing on patterns of sanctification, redemption, and deification.”<sup>638</sup>

Through restructuring the ecocentric worldview of Nat worship, the Kachin churches need to see “*Karai Kasang* as panentheistic God,” both transcendent and immanent, who empowers and exists in and within the whole of creation. The Jain concept of *jiva* really helps the Kachin people understand the presence of Nats in every living thing and being. Like *jiva* (soul) in Jainism, Nats are present in every non-human thing and being, like mountains, rivers, trees, skies and so forth, and are to be regarded as “living things and beings” that are co-living in a sense of the interrelatedness of the interbeing with human beings. Every living thing and being has his/her/its own inherent value and, therefore, should be treated equally and respectfully. In this sense, our Kachin churches have to read and try to find truth and meaning not only in the Bible but also in the “Book of Nature” that God has given us through Nat worship. Then, we are to hear the “cries of the poor” from the groaning of the whole creation. “We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now” (Romans 8:22, NRSV).

Critically speaking, human “arrogance, ignorance, and greed”<sup>639</sup> are the main causes of the impacts of globalization on ecological devastation. In this case, the Kachin people need to recuperate the Jain doctrine of *ahimsa* in realization of non-harmful and selflessness, to get rid of all the arrogance, ignorance, and greed. God does not allow the people to use wealth by exploiting others and nature. Relatively speaking, God wants to be generous and compassionate for the well-being of both humans and non-humans.

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<sup>638</sup> Jenkins, *Ecologies of Grace: Environmental Ethics and Christian Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 19-22.

<sup>639</sup> Robert Parham, *Loving Neighbors Across Time* (Birmingham: New Hope, 1991), 8.

Subsequently, the protection from over destruction must be accomplished through the sustainable way of *ahimsa* or non-violence. Hence, we can conclude that the Kachin concept of Nat worship and the Jain doctrine of *ahimsa* are *complementary* to each other. Regardless of different approaches, they are *relational* in terms of empathy and care for the whole of creation. Both reject *anthropocentrism* which subtly endorses our species' destructive dominance of nature through human *atta* (selfishness), in favor of *ecocentrism* that takes seriously the intrinsic value of life, i.e., *ecocentric spirituality*. It is, therefore, the responsibility of every pastor, minister, deacon, leader, and all congregants to read the Bible with the "eyes of ecocentric spirituality" and to carry out the ongoing task of "ReEdenization"<sup>640</sup> in today's Kachin society.

#### D. Ecoprocess Spirituality as Kachin Ecofeminist Theology

In this section, I consider insights from Saw Hlaing Bwa, Jay McDaniel, Marti Kheel, Brian Henning, Paul Waldau, Peter Singer, Tom Regan, Karen Warren, Maria Mies, and Vandava Shiva that help to refine my vision of a Kachin ecofeminism. My approach to ecoprocess spirituality challenges the traditional anthropocentric-patriarchal theology. Anthropocentric-patriarchal separation of human beings with nature blinds us to the interconnectedness of all life in the web of life and thus made man the crown of creation. Regarding this Hlaing Bwa asserts:

In reality, the separation and the estrangement that is caused by the dualistic and discriminative value judgment is sin, and therefore the anthropocentrism that is based on dualism is sin. We need to repent and turn back from the sin of anthropocentrism and reorient our way of life on

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<sup>640</sup> This term "ReEdenization" means to construct a beautiful and a better place like the Garden of Eden before the Fall of Humans in today's human society. See Samuel Ngun Ling, "Ecology" (Lecture, Myanmar Institute of Theology, Yangon, Myanmar, 2003), 9.

the holistic, non-dualistic vision of biocentrism or eco-centrism that reverses all life that is given by God in God's Kindom.<sup>641</sup>

Thus, "every human life is connected with every other, organically and ecologically... Human life is linked organically and interdependently to everything else on earth."<sup>642</sup> The New Testament's core statement, "God is love," fits well with panentheism (I John 4:7-11). Love is that energy, that quality in the process, that shapes life's relationships rightly, in ways that are more harmonious, empowering, joyous, and just, reflecting the divine.<sup>643</sup> Therefore, authentic theology or spirituality or religion must be ecocentric. Ecocentric theology with the practice of ecospirituality is "a necessary companion and resource for the journey to the future envisaged by the Kindom of God."<sup>644</sup>

At the heart of the Christian message, we affirm that God's saving work in Christ has to do with reconciliation of the entire creation. That inclusive message is found at the heart of the most familiar and inspiring statements about atonement. Colossians 1:15-20 proclaims that "all things in heaven and earth...have been created through Christ and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together.... Through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself to all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross" (Colossians 1:15-20, NRSV).<sup>645</sup> The work

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<sup>641</sup> Saw Hlaing Bwa, "Vision of the Kindom of God: Vision of the Whole Creation," *RAYS: MIT Journal of Theology* vol. 12 (2011): 150-151.

<sup>642</sup> Howard A. Snyder, *EarthCurrents: The Struggle for the World's Soul* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 183.

<sup>643</sup> Hlaing Bwa, "Vision of the Kindom of God," 153-154. The "Kingdom" as being a patriarchal, authoritative, and hierarchical structure is intentionally avoided in favor of the "Kindom" with its emphasis on the kinship, interrelatedness, interconnectedness, belongingness, and oneness of all beings within the web of interbeing. For the usage of the term "Kindom" see Knitter, *Without Buddha I Could not be a Christian*, 168-172, 191-199, 211-212. Cf. Saw Hlaing Bwa, "Vision of the Kindom of God: Vision of the Whole Creation," *RAYS: MIT Journal of Theology* vol. 12 (2011): 138.

<sup>644</sup> *Ibid.*, 155.

<sup>645</sup> Denis Edwards, *Ecology at the Heart of Faith* (New York: Orbis Books, 2006), 59.

of Jesus Christ is, therefore, “about holding, not just human beings, but *all things* together, and reconciling, not only human beings, but *all things* to God.”<sup>646</sup>

McDaniel articulates that “the world needs people who are life-centered or biocentric. Life-centered is to be respectful of both life and environment, biocentrism is an antidote to that human-centeredness that sees humans as the measure of all things and that believes humans, and humans alone, are worthy of our moral regard.”<sup>647</sup> Cobb states:

Whitehead’s philosophy can be understood as a deep ecology. It affirms the intrinsic value of all things and their radical interdependence in such a way that those who follow him should be profoundly sensitive to the inherent importance of what happens to all things and to how the effects of each act ramify throughout the whole. Furthermore, the importance of what happens is by no means limited to its importance for human beings. People with such sensitivities should have been the first to become aware of the ecological crisis and the most perceptive in their response.<sup>648</sup>

Kachin people need to hold this tradition of faithfulness and relevance as they bring ecological awareness and concern into their vision of the Kindom of God in their land. “Journeying together in the Kindom of God” calls all Kachin people “to leave behind the past-oriented anthropocentric life and live a future-oriented biocentric life, in that a transformation from the old life to a new life is envisaged in the New Heaven and New Earth”<sup>649</sup> of ecocentric spirituality. God does not allow men to use wealth by exploiting women and nature. Ruether also asserts that “the urgent task of ecological culture is to convert human consciousness to the earth, so that we can use our minds to understand the web of life and to live in that web of life as sustainers rather than

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<sup>646</sup> Hlaing Bwa, “Vision of the Kindom of God,” 157-158.

<sup>647</sup> McDaniel, *Of God and Pelicans*, 14-16.

<sup>648</sup> John B. Cobb Jr., “Deep Ecology and Process Thought,” *Religion Online*, <https://www.religion-online.org/article/deep-ecology-and-process-thought/> (accessed September 19, 2018).

<sup>649</sup> Hlaing Bwa, “Vision of the Kindom of God,” 161.

destroyers of it.”<sup>650</sup> It is, therefore, the responsibility of every pastor, minister, deacon, leader, and all the congregants to “think both locally and globally and act locally and globally.”<sup>651</sup>

As discussed above, the central tenets of process theology, such as relational, interconnectedness, interdependence, and the value of nature and harmony can be integrated with the Kachin indigenous Nat worship to help heal the exploitation of the nature and women in today’s Kachin land. A Kachin ecofeminist theology is, therefore, to be constructed by connecting the process-relational perspectives, the positive elements of the Nat worship, and ecofeminism. Because both process theology and ecofeminism focus on non-dualistic relations, using them together in the Kachin context can be helpful. Thus, Marti Kheel’s new approach of “ecofeminist veganism/ecofeminist holist philosophy” is a good starting point for the Kachin community for the liberation of both women and non-human beings (other-than-humans).

In her book, *Nature Ethics: An Ecofeminist Perspective*, Kheel was disappointed to discover that “ecofeminists too often displayed a similar absence of concern for other-than-humans.”<sup>652</sup> Ecofeminists rarely discussed other animals and vegetarianism. She suspects that “the neglect of other-than-humans was not an incidental aspect of the Western nature philosophies, but central to it.”<sup>653</sup> Thus, Kheel starts off by contrasting ecofeminist holism from the holisms she has examined, including other-than-human

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<sup>650</sup> Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 88-92.

<sup>651</sup> Ruether, *Gaia and God*, 272.

<sup>652</sup> Marti Kheel, *Nature Ethics: An Ecofeminist Perspective* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2008), 20.

<sup>653</sup> Ibid.

individuals under the whole. Kheel then proposes that an ecofeminist holist philosophy might have emphasized six themes:

(1) an attempt to understand the current domination of women and nature in its varying social, political, and historical contexts; (2) an acknowledgment of the role of unconscious influences, and in particular the role of gender identity; in shaping attitudes toward nature; (3) an appreciation of the potential of metaphors to facilitate and impede ethical consciousness; (4) a recognition of the importance of appropriate feelings of care and act of attention in promoting ethical conduct and thought; (5) an affirmation of the moral significance of both individuals and larger “whole”; and (6) support for the practice of veganism as an important means of expressing care toward other animals.<sup>654</sup>

Grounding her ecofeminist holist philosophy on these six major themes, Kheel proposes “veganism as an important means for reducing that suffering and for contributing to the overall well-being of the natural world.”<sup>655</sup> Kheel concludes that a “holist ecofeminist philosophy” is a “way of life” or a “mode of consciousness” that invites people to be “responsible,” not in the sense of obligations and rights, but in the sense of ability to respond. It calls to end the dualistic thinking that separates reason from emotion, the conscious from the unconscious, the “domestic” from the “wild,” and animal advocacy from nature ethics.<sup>656</sup> Kheel’s holist ecofeminist philosophy also shows Kachin people how to live in a way of ecofeminist veganism, which has a preferential option for the exploited and oppressed women as well as other-than-human animals and concerns in real empathetic care for their sufferings.

Kheel’s holist efominist theology also aligns with processs ethics of “relationality or interconnectedness.” In his book, *The Ethics of Creativity*, Brian G. Henning shows how Whitehead’s model of morality is different from traditional ethical theories toward

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<sup>654</sup> Ibid., 208.

<sup>655</sup> Ibid., 233.

<sup>656</sup> Ibid., 251.

nonhuman beings. Henning states that, “traditionally, ethical theories held that the only morally significant relations are inter-human relations and those obtaining between human beings.”<sup>657</sup> Whitehead insists that “every individual has value not only for itself, but also for others and for the whole of reality for the development of an organic moral philosophy.”<sup>658</sup> For McDaniel, “the natural world has value in itself, and all living beings are worthy of respect and care. Rocks and trees, hills and rivers are not simply facts in the world; they are also acts of self-realization.”<sup>659</sup> Thus, we can conclude that every sentient being has inherent value. According to Paul Waldau, sentient beings “are capable of a wide range of experiences and suffering.”<sup>660</sup> Concerning animals, Whitehead expresses that “animal body is composed of entities, which are mutually expression and feeling” because feeling or prehension “is the reception of expressions. Expressions are the data for feeling.”<sup>661</sup> I agree with Whitehead when he mentions that animals are sentient beings as well as emotional beings.<sup>662</sup> Animals are, therefore, sentient beings who have experiences and feel pain and suffering, and animals have minds like human beings. Thus, Peter Singer defines that “equal consideration of interests” is required if a being is capable of suffering or experiencing enjoyment or happiness, no matter what the nature of the being, “the principle of equality requires that its suffering be counted equally with the like suffering.”<sup>663</sup> Singer’s principle does entail with respect to the

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<sup>657</sup> Brian G. Henning, *The Ethics of Creativity: Beauty, Morality, and Nature in a Processive Cosmos* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2005), 1.

<sup>658</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>659</sup> Jay McDaniel, *What is Process Thought? Seven Answers to Seven Questions* (Claremont: Process & Faith, 2008), 38.

<sup>660</sup> Paul Waldau, *Animal Rights: What Everyone Needs to Know* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 52.

<sup>661</sup> Alfred North Whitehead, *Modes of Thought* (New York: The Free Press, 1968), 23.

<sup>662</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>663</sup> Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation: The Definitive Classic of the Animal Movement* (New York: HarperCollins, 2009), 8.



formation of moral judgments concerning the treatment of humans and nonhuman animals. Singer's "equally consideration of interests" is very much related to Tom Regan's "subject of a life." Regan claims that some animals, for example, mammalian animals and birds have psychological capacities and therefore they are "subject of a life" and given the rights view, to be treated as ends in themselves.<sup>664</sup> That is why Regan uses the term, "subject of a life," which is a basic moral right to respectful treatment and they are qualified to be in a moral community.<sup>665</sup> Thus, for Regan, nonhuman animals are also qualified to have moral rights and inherent value because they all are subjects of a life.<sup>666</sup>

McDaniel also points out that "the universe as a whole is a seamless web of interconnected events, none of which can be completely separated from the others. Everything is connected to everything else and contained in everything else."<sup>667</sup> In this sense, a process ethics of "relationality or interconnectedness" is very important for the Kachin people to understand a model of morality, which refers to all creatures. Humans are also animals because humans are primates, mammals, vertebrates, which are animal categories.<sup>668</sup> The Kachin creation story also shows that both humans and all animals share a common ancestor—*Ninggawn Chyunun* and *Hpunggam Woishun*. Both humans and all other-than-humans are siblings and relational. *Karai Kasang* is taking care of all other-than-humans and Jesus Christ also died not only for humans but also for all other-than-humans. Romans 8:18-21 clearly supports that the entire creation are sufferings and longing for the salvation:

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<sup>664</sup> Tom Regan, *Defending Animal Rights* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 17.

<sup>665</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>666</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>667</sup> McDaniel, *What is Process Thought?* 37.

<sup>668</sup> Waldau, *Animal Rights*, 5-6.

<sup>18</sup> I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. <sup>19</sup> For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; <sup>20</sup> for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope <sup>21</sup> that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. (NRSV)

As an ecofeminist theology advocates “the need for a new cosmology and a new anthropology which recognizes that life in nature is maintained by means of cooperation, and mutual care and love,”<sup>669</sup> ecoprocess spirituality as Kachin ecofeminism can promote the harmonious way of living in which humans and other-than-human animals are considered siblings. They are all mutually interdependent, mutually interrelated, and mutually interconnected in the web of interbeing. Whitehead’s attempt to overcome classical dualism—distinction between God and the world— “creator/created, lord/servant, maker/made, form/matter, cause/effect, subject/object,”<sup>670</sup> is amenable to this Kachin ecofeminist theology. Whitehead eliminated the Creator/creature dichotomy by replacing the notion of God the Creator with the view that God is with all creation. An important dichotomy is subject/object dualism which ecofeminist analysis cites frequently as the basis for objectification of women and nature.<sup>671</sup> In Whitehead’s thought, “each actuality is both subject and object. In its emergence, each actuality is an experiencing subject with the capacity for self-determination. Persons, who are societies of actualities, are both subjects and objects. Persons are capable of experiencing others and of being experienced by others. Persons are both means and ends with respect to their value.”<sup>672</sup> Whitehead also rejects the dichotomy of stereotypically describing men as

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<sup>669</sup> Maria Mies & Vandana Shiva, *Ecofeminism* (London: ZED Books, 1993), 6.

<sup>670</sup> Howell, *A Feminist Cosmology*, 21.

<sup>671</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>672</sup> *Ibid.*

rational and women as emotional. For Whitehead, reason and emotion, in his process terms, “prehension” and “feeling,” are integrated aspects of persons. Both reason and emotion mutually exclusive approaches to the world. Reason and emotion are not two oppositional, but equally important ways of responding to the world.<sup>673</sup> Kachin ecofeminist theology correlate the domination of women with the domination of nature and the superiority of culture over nature. This insists that we cannot overcome the hierarchy of male over female without overcoming the hierarchy of humans over nature. Process theology’s rejection of traditional dichotomy that has been used as a basis for the identification of woman with the body/emotion and of man with the mind/reason is the best contribution to Kachin ecofeminist theology. This provides a Kachin ecofeminist theology of non-dualism.<sup>674</sup>

Whitehead’s philosophy of organism is also a helpful conceptual framework for Kachin ecofeminist theology to interpret Kachin women’s experiences in terms of relational and organic thinking. Process thought provides a conceptual frame within which Kachin women may understand and interpret their experiences.<sup>675</sup> Process theology rejects the patriarchal philosophies that exclude women’s experiences. Nancy R. Howell says, “Whitehead insisted upon the inclusion of every variety of experience.”<sup>676</sup> Sheila Greeve Davaney affirms that the process notions of “dependence, freedom, and the intrinsic value of the experiencing subject” offers “the feminist

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<sup>673</sup> Ibid., 22-23.

<sup>674</sup> Valerie C. Saiving, “Androgynous Life: A Feminist Appropriation of Process Thought (The Harvard University Dudelian Lecture),” in *Feminism and Process Thought: The Harvard Divinity School/Claremont Center for Process Studies Symposium Papers*, ed. Davaney, Sheila Greeve (New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1981), 18, 26-27.

<sup>675</sup> Howell, *A Feminist Cosmology*, 14-15.

<sup>676</sup> Ibid., 16.

understanding of women as subjects.”<sup>677</sup> History has portrayed women as objects.

However, Whitehead’s metaphysical system supports “experiencing subjects as units or momentary instances of process and analyzes them under two broad aspects—as subjects for themselves in the immediacy of their own experience and as objects available to contribute to subsequent experiencing subjects.”<sup>678</sup> Thus, process theology’s inclusion of every variety of experience provides Kachin ecofeminist theology a new way of transforming the experiential interrelations between men and women, humans and earth.

Moreover, as the important connections exist between the treatment of women on one hand and the treatment of nonhuman nature on the other, according to Karen J. Warren, “trees, water, animals, toxins, and nature language are, therefore, feminist issues.”<sup>679</sup> Then, the ecological crises in Kachin land, such as deforestation, soil depletion, pollution and poverty are to be considered feminist issues. Kachin women are the primary sufferers of the environmental degradation. Healing the ecological crises must, therefore, go together with the liberation of women from all kinds of abuse and discrimination. Both Kachin men and women are to be aware of the transformation of the relationship between men and women and to the whole eco-system of nature. Vandava Shiva’s *Making Peace with the Earth* outlines how the Kachin people can “shift from hierarchical monoculture, a system of exclusions and domination, to inclusive cultures based on diversity,” with the recognition that:

Earth Rights are Human Rights  
Earth Rights are Women’s Rights

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<sup>677</sup> Sheila Greeve Davaney, ed. *Feminism and Process Thought: The Harvard Divinity School/Claremont Center for Process Studies Symposium Papers* (New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1981), 4.

<sup>678</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>679</sup> Karen J. Warren, “Taking Empirical Data Seriously: An Ecofeminist Philosophical Perspective,” in *Ecofeminism: Women, Culture, Nature*, ed. Karen J. Warren (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 4.

Earth Rights are Indigenous Rights  
Earth Rights are the Rights of Children, Youth, and Future Generations.<sup>680</sup>

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<sup>680</sup> Vandana Shiva, *Making Peace with the Earth* (London: Pluto Press, 2013), 266.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### A CONSTRUCTIVE KACHIN CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY OF MONOGAMOUS MARRIAGE AND THE ORDINATION OF WOMEN

The implication of my constructive Kachin Christian theology is that the Kachin process-ecofeminist theology is bound up with the monogamous marriage and the ordination of women. The Kachin churches not just need to promote monogamy over polygamy but rather ways women should be treated in their intimate relationships to rule out polygamy and abusive monogamy. I will reassess the biblical teaching on monogamy and response to polygamy from a Christian sexual ethics will also be critically discussed. Then, the theology of marriage and family in terms of monogamy versus polygamy from Kachin Christian feminist ethical perspectives will be reconstructed. In order to break the socio-cultural (the pre-Christian hierarchical) and theological (the dualistic and patriarchal teachings of the missionaries) walls that block women's ordination in today's Kachin churches, I try to find the real meaning of "ordination" and I revisit the Nat worship to revive the concept of "women's ordination." I then offer some starting points for the next steps for promoting and advancing women's ordination among the Kachin Baptist churches.

#### A. Reconstructing the Theology of Marriage and Family in Kachin Christian Context

In quest for this background of misinterpretation of the Bible and the influences of Nat worship on polygamy, the theology of marriage and family should be urgently reconstructed in light of a feminist ethical perspective. Only in this way, the polygamous

marriage can be removed and replaced with the Western Christian model of monogamous marriage in which men and women, husbands and wives can have equality of rights.

### 1. Biblical Teachings on Monogamy

The clearest evidence that monogamy can be found in Jesus Christ's teaching on marriage in Matthew 19:3-6. In this passage, Jesus Christ quoted the Genesis creation account, in particular Genesis 1:27 and 2:24, saying "the two will become one flesh," not more than two. Lisa S. Cahill also points out that "the positive biblical vision of sex focuses on faithful, heterosexual marriage, and sex outside of that context is clearly not part of the normative picture for the early Christians."<sup>681</sup> God prohibited the kings of Israel to be polygamous (Deuteronomy 17:17). The kings got into troubles when they disobeyed God, including killing between David's sons from his different wives (II Samuel 13, I Kings 2); and Solomon became an idolater because of his hundreds of wives (I Kings 11:1-3).<sup>682</sup>

A father of faith, "Abraham and Sarah would have been monogamous apart from a low point in their faith when Hagar became a second wife (note how much strife this caused later). Jacob only wanted Rachel, but was tricked into marrying her older sister Leah, and later took their slave girls at the sisters' urging due to the rivalry between the sisters. Jacob was hardly at a spiritual high point at those times."<sup>683</sup> In view of the problems it caused, it is certain that "polygamy was unknown among the Jews after the

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<sup>681</sup> Lisa Sowle Cahill, *Sex, Gender and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 154-155.

<sup>682</sup> Jonathan Sarfati, "Does the Bible Clearly Teach Monogamy?" in *Creation Ministries International*, <https://web.archive.org/web/20180928030212/https://creation.com/does-the-bible-clearly-teach-monogamy> (accessed September 26, 2018).

<sup>683</sup> Ibid.

Babylonian exile, and monogamy was the rule even among the Greeks and Romans by New Testament times.”<sup>684</sup> Margaret Farley also strongly proves that marriage for both Greeks and Romans was monogamous.<sup>685</sup>

The Tenth Commandment “You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife...” (Exodus 20:17, NRSV) also supports that there is only one wife. Polygamy is expressly forbidden not just for the church elders (I Timothy 3:2), because Paul also wrote: “each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband” (I Corinthians 7:2, NRSV). Paul further explains that “marital duties in terms that make sense only with one husband to one wife.”<sup>686</sup>

## 2. Christian Sexual Ethics Responses to Polygamy

Cahill articulates that Christian sexual ethics needs an analysis of the social ramifications of sex which is both critical and constructive. “Sexual pleasure is good,” but “sexual pleasure should be sought only in a context of *mutual consent*, of responsibility for procreation, or of marital commitment, etc.”<sup>687</sup> Mutual consent here refers to “marital commitment in monogamous marriage.” That means, the biblical norms which require the couple to stay in their marriage “faithful and love” to each other. Such kind of mutual consent based on faithful and love cannot be found in polygamy. There can be some women, who consent to being co-wives or agree their husband to take many wives, however, it is uncertain that, in practical sense, whether they all can truly love him

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<sup>684</sup> Ibid.

<sup>685</sup> Margaret Farley, *Just Love: A Framework for Christian Sexual Ethics* (New York: Continuum, 2010), 28.

<sup>686</sup> Sarfati, “Does the Bible Clearly Teach Monogamy?”

<sup>687</sup> Cahill, *Sex, Gender and Christian Ethics*, 48.



equally and faithful to him or whether he can truly love all his wives equally and faithful to them. In the other side, there are also many abusive monogamous marriages that women cannot have treated equally. Thus, both abusive monogamous and polygamous marriages are unchristian because both lacks mutuality, equality, and commitment. In modern times, “monogamy is praised as appropriate to the interpersonal union and commitment of spouses.”<sup>688</sup>

In order to represent strcutures of mutuality and fulfillment, but no longer domination, “contemporary Christians who seek equality for women and men typically seek to revalorize both men’s and women’s sexuality and parenthood.”<sup>689</sup> However, it is a vital task of Christian social ethics to transform the marriage and family as institutions.<sup>690</sup> According to Farley, the teachings of Jesus and his followers, as recorded in the New Testament, offered grounds for a sexual ethic that:

(1) values marriage and procreation on the one hand and singleness and celibacy on the other; (2) gives as much or more importance to internal attitudes and thoughts as to external actions; and (3) affirms a sacred symbolic meaning for sexual intercourse, yet both subordinates it as a value to other human values and finds in it a possibility for evil.<sup>691</sup>

What Farley tries to offer is “a framework for sexual ethics based on norms of justice—those norms which govern all human relationships” and in particularly “to the intimacy of sexual relations.”<sup>692</sup> She asserts, “the norms are derived from the concrete reality of persons and are focused on respect for their autonomy and relationality. This is to respect

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<sup>688</sup> Ibid., 90-91.

<sup>689</sup> Ibid., 164.

<sup>690</sup> Ibid., 165.

<sup>691</sup> Farley, *Just Love*, 38.

<sup>692</sup> Ibid., 230-231.

persons as ends in themselves. Relationality is to be respected through requirements of mutuality, equality, commitment, fruitfulness, and social justice.”<sup>693</sup>

### 3. Monogamy versus Polygamy

The beginning and the original concept of *Hpu Ja* was not as it is today. If a man wanted to marry a woman, he had to ask permission from the family of the bride and show his appreciation by offering some valuable gifts (money, silver, gold, cows, buffaloes, pigs, etc.) to the extent his resources permitted. The thought behind the gifts was not that the groom was buying his bride, but that he would be leaving the bride’s family with precious gifts in her absence since she herself is priceless. In this way, the offering of valuable gifts to the family showed respect and honor to the bride. The family of the bride also should not ask for any extra gifts or money from the groom’s family again. They must accept what the groom’s family offered them. However, this good concept of *Hpu Ja* was gone later on. Then, it finally turned to a custom of “selling and trading the bride,” which harms, dishonors, and dehumanizes women. Similarly, the original concept and practice of *Nla Dap* was also good because it was a place for social gathering, sharing, and fellowship of young people, but not for having sex. However, it turned out to be a place of free sex at the time of British colonial administration. There were many British soldiers as well as Indian soldiers who didn’t know anything about the *Nla Dap* culture. Hence, they used it as a place for having sex.<sup>694</sup> Subsequently, *Nla Dap*

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<sup>693</sup> Ibid.

<sup>694</sup> Sinwa Awng (Kutkai Kachin Baptist Church), “NLA DAP (NUM LA DAP)” (A Place/Room for Taking a Wife).

became a place of sexual entertainment that made women and girls as the sexual objects for fulfilling the desire of men.

What the Kachin churches need to do is to radically transform the bad practices which encouraged polygamy inherited from the Nat Worship like *Hpu Ja* and *Nla Dap*. The Kachin churches need to retain those good things and eliminate the bad. The system of *Hpu Ja*, should be replaced by the “*Tsawra Hkungga/Kumhpa*” (An Honorable Gift or Love Gift). In this way, there are no more meetings of judging the bride-price because it harms women’s rights. Likewise, the original concept of *Nla Dap*—social gathering, sharing, and fellowship of young people, where they can meet and find their life partner—needs to be retained. However, the free sex of *Nla Dap* is necessary to be totally excluded from the Kachin society. Therefore, to build a healthy Christian marriage in Kachin society, Jesus Christ must be a transformer of the “*Hpu Ja* and *Nla Dap* Traditions.” Then, the essence of the Kindom of God can be seen in the Kachin monogamous marriage. The Kachin people should eliminate polygamy because it is the better way to become Christian. I propose some guidelines for ethical loving relationship of Christian marriage that offers equality and justice for Kachin women.

The framework of Christian marriage has been marked by three elements: monogamy, sexual exclusivity, and permanence. Today’s Kachin families should be based on monogamous marriage as a model of Christian marriage. Farley proposes:

Monogamy is the model of choice for most persons in our culture, and certainly for committed Christians. It is thought to be the model that best serves marriage based on love, especially romantic love; it is a model that offers the possibility of intimacy and companionship as goods in themselves; it is a model that can nurture the kind of affection that children need; it is a model that can provide both sex and love in ways that lead to the highest forms of friendship; it is a model that can incorporate

understandings of transcendent embodiment and a communion between spouses that partakes of and leads to communion with God.<sup>695</sup>

The goals of marriage are “the goals of love: embodied and inspired union, companionship, communion, fruitfulness, caring and being cared for, opening to the world of others, and lives made sacred in faithfulness to one another and to God.”<sup>696</sup> This is what the Kachin people should have to build up their families in light of monogamous marriage.

No doubt, Kachin customs of *Hpu Ja* and *Nla Dap* are the assault and domination of patriarchal culture. According to Sara Ruddick, assault as injustice is to disclose connections between assault and domination. Domination is typically thought to be itself unjust and is sometimes thought to be constituted of injustice. Assault is both an instrument of domination and a consequence of its failure.<sup>697</sup> Without eradicating the polygamy system of Kachin marriage, women and girls can never be free from the assault and domination of men, both inside and outside the family. Kanyoro also strongly claims that:

Polygamy thrives in patriarchal cultures that uphold of the superiority of male persons.... Polygamy has been the basis of the exploitation of women and children’s labor because polygamy is justified as a means of enhancing the productivity of property for men... Polygamy also depicts women as weak...It reduces women’s capacity....<sup>698</sup>

Ruether is right in the context of Kachin women in Myanmar when she mentions about the polygamous marriage of Celts and Germans. She describes that “the Celts and

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<sup>695</sup> Ibid., 263-265.

<sup>696</sup> Ibid., 268.

<sup>697</sup> Sara Ruddick, “Injustice in Families: Assault and Domination,” in *Justice and Care: Essential Readings*, ed., Virginia Held (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1995), 213.

<sup>698</sup> Kanyoro, “Engendered Communal Theology: African Women’s Contribution to Theology in the Twenty-first Century,” 30.

Germans practiced a ‘resource polygyny’ that allowed powerful chiefs to accumulate a plurality of wives and concubines.”<sup>699</sup> These women offered such chiefs “a variety of sexual relations and many children.” They also offered “the skills to run large household economies, including doing much of the agricultural work.”<sup>700</sup> Taking this into account, the Kachin practices of polygamy and polygyny is the violation and abuses of women’s human rights. Susan Moller Okin also states:

Some generally recognized human rights abuses have specifically gender related forms that were not typically recognized as human rights abuses. Frequently, these abuses are perpetrated by more powerful family members against less powerful ones... But parents’ giving their daughter in marriage in exchange for money or even selling her to a pimp has not typically been seen as an instance of slavery. If a husband pays a bride price for his wife or marries her without her adult consent; if he confines her to their home, forbids her to work for pay, or appropriates her wages; if he beats her for disobedience or mishap; these manifestations of slavery would not be recognized as violations of human rights in many parts of the world.<sup>701</sup>

All Kachin women and girls therefore should have freedom of choice for their marriage. Okin quotes the Article 16 of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) that “marriage shall be entered into only with the free and full consent of the intending spouses,” and that “men and women of full age, without any limitation due to race, nationality or religion, have the right to marry and to found a family...(and) are entitled to equal rights as to marriage, during marriage and at its dissolution.”<sup>702</sup> Only in this way can polygamy and polygyny in Kachin society be decreased or totally eliminated.

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<sup>699</sup> Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Christianity and the Making of the Modern Family: Ruling Ideologies, Diverse Realities* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000), 51.

<sup>700</sup> Ibid.

<sup>701</sup> Susan Moller Okin, “Feminism, Women’s Human Rights and Cultural Differences,” in *Hypatia*, vol. 13, no. 2 (Border Crossings: Multicultural and Postcolonial Feminist Challenges to Philosophy (Part 1) (Spring, 1998), 35.

<sup>702</sup> Ibid., 39.

Both polygamy and polygyny have led to many conflicts in today's Kachin families in the churches. It is not just about sexual abuses to women by men (husband and wives/concubines); it is also domination and assault between wives and co-wives, wives and concubines. I agree with Anne Nasimiya-Wasike when she argues:

... even traditional rationales for polygyny show it to be an arrangement for the sake of men and harmful to women. It represents men's search for progeny and immortality; it sees women as dependent on men yet made for the sexual and economic service of men; it identifies women's worth with childbearing; it yields not harmony but conflict between women as co-wives; it subordinates some women to other women... polygynous relationships have crippled both women and men, and that this domestic institution is a sign of human brokenness.<sup>703</sup>

Kachin marriage and family in this way should be reconstructed in a way of reforming cultural practices. As a transformative ethics of discipleship, Christian sex and gender ethics in the Kachin society, builds on but reforms human cultural practices so that the Kachins better represent "the Christian values of incarnation, community, solidarity, fidelity, compassion, and hope that moral and social change are possible."<sup>704</sup>

#### B. Introducing Women's Ordination in the Kachin Baptist Churches

When we look at the history of the Christian churches and the original meaning of the ordination, we find that women were not excluded from ordination. According to Nancy Vyhmeister, "the term "ordination" originally comes from the Latin *ordinare*, "to put in *ordo*," with *ordo* meaning "row, rank, or order." In ancient Rome, *ordo* referred to

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<sup>703</sup> Farley, *Just Love*, 87.

<sup>704</sup> Cahill, *Sex, Gender and Christian Ethics*, 257.

a category of people, as in the “order of senators,” distinguished from the plebe.”<sup>705</sup> In ecclesiastical Latin, *ordo* refers to the “holy orders” and *ordinare* to “the ceremony of induction into holy orders.”<sup>706</sup> According to Canon Law, the “sacrament of holy orders” constitutes some faithful Christians as “sacred ministers by means of the indelible character with which they are marked.” While the English verb “ordain” can mean to “issue an order,” its ecclesiastical meaning is “to invest with ministerial or priestly authority.”<sup>707</sup> The modern definition of *ordination* is “the investiture of clergy” or “the act of granting pastoral authority or sacerdotal power.”<sup>708</sup> Generally, an ordination service is a ceremony in which someone is commissioned or appointed to a position within the church. Frequently, the ceremony includes the laying on of hands.<sup>709</sup> However, the biblical definition is a little different from the modern definition. The word “ordain” in the Bible refers to a setting in place or designation. For example, “Joseph was “ordained” as a ruler in Egypt (Acts 7:10); the steward in Jesus’ parable was “ordained” to oversee a household (Matthew 24:45); deacons were “ordained” to serve the Jerusalem church (Acts 6:1-6); and pastors were “ordained” in each city in Crete (Titus 1:5).”<sup>710</sup> These cases show that the “ordinations” are simply appointments.<sup>711</sup>

Historians have shown that “women functioned in their several liturgical and administrative roles not as laity, but as ordained ministers. Women were commissioned

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<sup>705</sup> Nancy Vyhmeister, “Ordination in the New Testament?” in *Ministry, International Journal for Pastors*, <https://web.archive.org/web/20180928030342/https://www.ministrymagazine.org/archive/2002/05/ordination-in-the-new-testament.html> (accessed September 26, 2018).

<sup>706</sup> Ibid.

<sup>707</sup> Ibid.

<sup>708</sup> Got Questions Ministries, “What does the Bible say about Ordination?” <https://web.archive.org/web/20180928030501/https://www.gotquestions.org/ordination.html> (accessed September 26, 2018).

<sup>709</sup> Ibid.

<sup>710</sup> Ibid.

<sup>711</sup> Ibid.

for particular roles in particular communities. Men during this period did not receive a different superior form of ordination from women. Both men and women understood themselves to be ordained in the same way.”<sup>712</sup> Historically, there is sufficient evidence to claim that women were considered as ordained ministers in the Western church of the Middle Ages. It can be clearly found that both the Old Testament and New Testament support the ordination of women. As women were prophets, deacons, church leaders, co-workers, and pastors in the early churches, today’s women can have equal rights to participate in the leadership roles of the churches, especially in the ordained ministry.

As I have discussed, women were involved in leadership roles as well as in the ordained ministry of the early Christian churches. We find that the real meaning of “ordination” and rereading of the Bible help find proof of women’s leadership roles, both in the Old Testament and the New Testament. It is seen that the Kachin Baptist women ministers are being rejected for ordination because of the impact of the socio-cultural and theological causes of the missionaries. Thus, it is very important to use the Kachin indigenous beliefs to help the argument for women’s ordination. Revisiting the primal religion of the Kachin people, Nat worship to use the feminine concept and ritual practice of *Kumba Shalai ai* (passing the blood-stained elephant grass “*Kumba*” by the bride) and re-portraying women as *Jaiwa-Dumsa* (the High Priest) are the starting points to revive the concept of “women’s ordination.”

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<sup>712</sup> Macy, *The Hidden History of Women’s Ordination*, 130.



## 1. Women's Ordination through the Practice of *Kumba Shalai ai*

It is crucial to start discussion about women's ordination in the Kachin context by using the feminine concept and ritual practice of *Kumba Shalai ai*. In this ritual practice, women's blood is found as pure and powerful. This helps change the superstitious views of women as lesser, weak, impure, and polluted. Hopefully then, a door for women ministers to get ordained will be opened. As the life of every creature is blood, the blood in Kachin context is an invaluable necessity for life. Thus, for the Kachins, the blood and life cannot be separated and are the keys to understanding the religious expression of the sacrificial approach. It can be clearly seen in the religious practice of the marriage ceremony. In the Kachin marriage ceremony, there is a practice of "*Kumba Shalai Ai*," passing the elephant grass "*Kumba*" by the bride. This is also to solemnize a marriage which is the main ritual portion of the Kachin marriage ceremony.

The arrangement of the elephant grass, "*Kumba*," is an important of the Wedding. "There is a hole dug for each of the family Nats represented and for each of the *Maraw* Nats (fates)," which are the three fates—"the fate of the bridegroom's house, the fate of the bride's family and of the emissaries." As a rule, there are three bunches of grass representing the *Gumgun Gumhpai* Nats in honor of the *Maraw* Nats.<sup>713</sup> When the agreement is reached for the bride-price, two male elders "carrying bamboo vessels filled with liquor approach" the *Dumsa*, and "ask permission to kill the sacrificial hog."<sup>714</sup> The *Dumsa* then steps forth and beheads the hog with his sacred sword. Then "the blood is sprinkled on the two rows of the elephant grass and on the log in between," and "the bride now steps forth, led by one or two female relatives, steps on the post and passes

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<sup>713</sup> Hanson, *The Kachins*, 187.

<sup>714</sup> Ibid.

between the grass, followed by the bridesmaids and some distant relatives.”<sup>715</sup> In some localities, a *Dumsa* “follows the bride, touching her forehead with a loop of elephant grass, signifying that anything improper and unlucky be left behind.”<sup>716</sup> This is called “*Kumba Shalai Ai*” (passing the elephant grass to solemnize a marriage) which is the main ritual part of the ceremony.<sup>717</sup>

Theologizing this religious practice of *Kumba Shalai ai*, it is like the practice of “baptism” in Christian tradition. All the sins of the bride are to be cleansed by the blood of the sacrificial animal before entering a new life—a new relationship with the family of her husband. This concept helps the Kachins to understand the expression of “born again” or “conversion” before Christianity. When the Kachins became Christians, they were baptized by the blood of Jesus, the sacrificial victim to have a new life or born again in Christ. This helps Kachin people understand that the interrelationships between women’s blood and the blood of sacrificial animals represents a circle of changing, birthing, and transforming. The whole community is to be transformed and blessed by the blood of women. In this sense, women’s monthly blood is not impurity; rather it is very powerful. As the concept and practice of *Kumba Shalai ai* totally depends on women, to enrich the spiritual well-being of the churches, it is also to be done by the ordained women ministers. This ritual shows that women were the center of religious roles in the Kachin community just as we saw the importance of women’s roles in both the Old Testament and New Testament. As Kachin people were changed into new life, Kachin women ordained ministers are necessary to perform the ritual rites of Baptism and Communion.

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<sup>715</sup> Ibid., 188.

<sup>716</sup> Ibid.

<sup>717</sup> Naw La, “The Kachin Traditional Religion and the Gospel,” 71.

## 2. Women as *Jaiwa-Dumsa*, the High Priests

Another important starting point for initiating women's ordination in today's Kachin Baptist churches is to re-portray women as *Jaiwa-Dumsa*. *Jaiwa* is the high priest (also called the Saga Teller) who has the highest authority and the most important figure in Kachin Nat worship and *Dumsa* is an important priest next to the *Jaiwa*. Since I want to portray the functions of women ministers in Kachin culture as the roles and functions of both *Jaiwa* and *Dumsa*, it is more appropriate to combine these two terms, *Jaiwa-Dumsa*. Not only men, but also women were allowed to become the spiritual leaders of the community. Both *Jaiwa* and *Dumsa* are responsible for the spiritual welfare of the Kachin people. They are considered to be the "mediators" between the Kachin people and the Nats. They are the guides of the way to reconcile, to appease the Nats and are also the bridge to have blessings and prosperity. The roles of the Nat priest can be considered ordained pastors in today's churches. According to Ja Li, there were many *Num Jaiwa-Dumsa* (women high priests) in the time of Nat worship. Women were the first high priests. Men become high priests only by learning from women high priests. Women high priests were more intelligent, more powerful, and more detailed than men high priests.<sup>718</sup>

Thus, for constructing women's ordination in the Kachin context, the inevitably theological task is to reveal women as *Jaiwa-Dumsa* to perform the duties of ordained ministry. Revealing women as *Jaiwa-Dumsa* helps both Kachin men and women understand how ordaining women ministers is important and necessary for the spiritual enrichment of the churches.

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<sup>718</sup> Pungga Ja Li, *Jinghpaw a Hkap la Hkan sa Shatup Lam* (What Kachins Believe and Practice) vol. 3 (Laiza, Myitkyina: Htunghking the Laili Laika Magam Dap, n.d), 86-87.

### 3. From Ordination of Deaconesses to Ordination of Women Ministers

The Kachin Baptist Convention has been ordaining deaconesses since the 1970s. There are thousands of ordained deaconesses in the Kachin Baptist Convention. Every Kachin Baptist church has ordained deaconesses. The Kachin Baptist churches do not appoint deacons/deaconesses without ordination. However, most Kachin Baptist churches do not accept ordination of women ministers. For them, ordination of deaconesses and women ministers is very different in both meaning and purpose. The roles of deacon and deaconess in today's Kachin Baptist churches are very limited. They are allowed only to assist the pastors. They are not allowed to preach and teach. They are not eligible to conduct any religious ceremonies. The Kachin Baptist churches hold that ordination of ministers bestows special authority and magical powers of the Holy Spirit, which is why women ministers are not eligible to be ordained.

While the roles and functions of deacon/deaconess and pastors are not the same, the meaning of "ordination" is the same. The ordination processes are identical in practice. For example, both ordination services involve the laying on of hands. As discussed above, the biblical concepts of ordination for deacon/deaconess and ministers are not different in meaning. In both ordinations, the church publicly invokes God's blessing upon the persons to become devoted servants to the special work of ministry. I agree with Samuel Koranteng-Pipim when he argues that "the New Testament teaches that the act of ordination does not confer any special grace or holiness upon the one ordained. It does not bestow special magical powers of the Holy Spirit; neither does it confer upon the elders or pastors some special character which sets the person apart as a

priest.”<sup>719</sup> In this regard, the Kachin Baptist churches need to be aware that the ordination of deacons/deaconesses and ordination of ministers are not different in meaning and purpose. Both deacons/deaconesses and ministers are, by ordination, authoritatively commissioned to declare the gospel, to organize churches, and to ensure the spiritual well-being the members of the churches. Therefore, Kachin women ministers are also eligible and can legitimately be commissioned through ordination to perform the leadership functions of pastor.

This initiation of women’s ordination is not a fight against men or an act of revenge against men, but it is fundamentally arguing against the “Isms, Systems, Institutions, and Structures” that violate, oppress, and dehumanize women. Kachin men and women need to form alliances and networks in support of efforts to eliminate the socio-religio-culture oppression of women. There is no ground to deny women’s ordination in today’s Kachin Baptist churches. As it is clearly stated in the Baptist Distinctiveness: “The priesthood of all believers,” Kachin Baptist women ministers should have equality of ordination with male ministers. To reject women’s ordination is also a discrimination against women’s God-given rights. I express this with my poem, “Dawn of Women’s Ordination,” which helps heal the hierarchical, patriarchal, and dualistic bias in the churches to develop possibilities for Kachin women’s ordination.

“Dawn of Kachin Women’s Ordination”

We say *love, love, love*

But, without preferential option for women

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<sup>719</sup> Samuel Koranteng-Pipim, “The Meaning and Purpose of Ordination,” <https://www.scribd.com/document/207338544/Meaning-of-Ordination> (accessed September 26, 2018).

There will be NO genuine love in the church.

We say *peace, peace, peace*

But, without restoration peacebuilding with women

There will be NO genuine peace in the church.

We say *justice, justice, justice*

But, without having gender justice

There will be NO genuine justice in the church.

We say *ordination, ordination, ordination*

But, without active listening to the voices of women about ordination

There will NEVER be genuine ordination in the church.

## CONCLUSION

The commonality of cultural identity and the religious foundation of the Kachin people is their indigenous religion—Nat worship. Nat worship is, in this regard, to be both the starting point and the meeting point for Kachin people. By making process-relational ecofeminist theology, Kachin Christians need to find solutions for the problems of environmental destruction as well as the unjustified subordination of women, and the coloniality of the dominant groups to take these connections seriously. It is also a movement committed to the elimination of male-gender power and privilege. To profoundly commit to a Kachin ecofeminist theology, Nat worship must no longer be the object, but the subject of reenvisioning *Karai Kasang* as Goddess and then building up an ecospirituality of justice and earth healing in today's Kachin land.

In this sense, therefore, in the quest for a non-patriarchal, non-hierarchical, and non-dualistic God, the Kachin people need to reformulate or rebirth their indigenous concept of Goddess, *Karai Kasang*. By integrating Kachin traditional beliefs with Christianity, process-relational feminist theology helps develop a Kachin ecofeminist theology for promoting an ecospirituality of justice and earth healing in today's Kachin land. *Karai Kasang* is no longer a patriarchal dualistic male God, but rather *Karai Kasang* is the Goddess. This strives preventing an ecological crisis and to assist women's struggles for freedom in addition to sustaining a thriving and prosperous life for the Kachin people.

The land the Kachin people have lost was organic. As natural resources and energy supplies diminish in the future, it is important to change our attitude, lifestyle, and our theology to sustain the quality of the environment. It can be possible when we begin

to explore decentralization, non-hierarchical forms of organization, recycling of wastes, simpler living styles involving less-polluting soft technologies, and labor-intensive rather than capital-intensive economic methods. The distribution of energy and resources among Kachin communities should be based on the integration of humans and natural ecosystems. All these Kachin ecofeminist efforts are directed towards reducing further ecological and social devastation. That could awaken the consciousness of the Kachin people to “the immense beauty and elegance of all life on this fragile, yet awesome, blue-green planet.”<sup>720</sup> A Kachin Christian nature spirituality should be based on “a subject-subjects model of being, knowing, and doing in place of the subject-object model of Western culture.”<sup>721</sup> We are to love *Karai Kasang* with all our heart, mind, soul and our strength; and we are to love our neighbor (nature) as we love ourselves (Mark 12:30-31) because we all are birthed in the image of *Karai Kasang* as *subjects*.

To start one of the practical reforms in today’s Kachin churches, it is essential to make a theological shift to ecofeminist theology by rewriting a common prayer of the Christian tradition, the Lord’s Prayer, in the light of God-Language with process-relational-ecofeminist perspectives. In this prayer, I intend to avoid the terms which have been influenced by the patriarchy/hierarchy such as Father, Lord. The “Kingdom” as a patriarchal, authoritative, and hierarchal structure is intentionally avoided in favor of the “Kindom” with its emphasis on the kinship, interrelatedness, interconnectedness, belongingness, and oneness of all beings within the web of interbeing.

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<sup>720</sup> Eaton, *Introducing Ecofeminist Theologies*, 10.

<sup>721</sup> Sallie McFague, *Super, Natural Christians: How We Should Love Nature* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 2.



OUR PRAYER:

Re-writing the Lord's Prayer in the light of God-Language

*Karai Kasang*, our Goddess,

Who lives *among* and *in* us.

For you gave birth and love both female and male equally,

You are worthy to be praised and honored.

*Karai Kasang*, your Kindom of love, peace, and justice is come,

Your will be done between women and men, nature and humans as it is in you.

Give us and fill us with foods of equal human rights,

Empower us to bear the fruits of the dignity of fully humanity.

*Karai Kasang*, do forgive our sins of exploitation of nature and

Discrimination against women,

As we forgive to those who ignore ecological crisis and women's human rights.

Do not let us fall into the temptation of oppression and

Exploitation of nature and women,

And save us and liberate us from such evil as social injustice and ecological sin.

*Karai Kasang*, for you are the ground and the fruitful vision,

You are the *One* who lures us and cooperates with us

in the ongoing process of the universe,

And the truth, goodness, and beauty of yours are with us, in us, and within us forever.

Amen!

This process-ecofeminist version of the Lord's Prayer contributes a resource for theological change in today's Kachin churches. This helps Kachin people begin a practical ecofeminist theology through their worship and liturgies. The lives of humans, plants, animals, and the Nats are interconnected. The heaven and the earth are always paired as the sources of life and generators of the seed of creation. Everything that is birthed is sacred because all these creatures share the breath of creation. *Karai Kasang* is, as the Creator and Maker, the Giver of Life of all things and beings. *Karai Kasang* gives breath and thought; *Karai Kasang* gives birth to the children; *Karai Kasang* watches over the happiness and the sufferings of the people; and *Karai Kasang* mediates on the goodness of all that exists in heaven and on earth.

In utilizing their religion, Nat worship, as a way of spiriting nature once again, the role of the Kachin people should be to "tend the garden," controlling the laws that dictate what will be done to their land. Likewise, they must also "birth" the land once again, and the land must produce again, with humanity as the midwife, helping the land produce trees, fresh water, protecting the animals, and preserving life. Then, once again the Nats will return, the spiritual laws will return to their place, and the evils of the world will finally subside.

The belief that every living thing has a spirit is a central feature of the Kachin Nat worship. The living can communicate with the spirits of dead people, plants, and animals through mediums, *Jaiwa-Dumsa*. The presence and wishes of the Nats are made known through them. They mediate between the ordinary world and the spiritual and ancestral realm. Not only ancestors, plants, and animals are endowed with spiritual power, but also places like lands, rivers, rocks, and trees are considered sacred due to the power of Nats

residing in them. It is forbidden to disturb these sacred places by constructing residences, roads, dams, and the like on or near them. This is especially true for water sources, because the belief is that any disturbance or pollution will anger or disturb the Nats protecting the place. The beings in the Nat world are responsible for protecting the natural world from human greed. I would insist that a respectful attitude toward nature is crucial to the conservation of biodiversity and that we must develop a more humane, more spiritual and sustainable community by drawing upon the cultural and spiritual resources of Christianity and Nat worship. A change in human attitude toward nature is needed, and indigenous people, with their teachings, can help provide this respectful relationship with the land.

Deforestation, colonization, Bamarnization, wars, militarization, and the socio-economic impoverishment of the Kachin women challenge all who hope for a more humane society. To heal such ecological crises must, therefore, go together with the liberation of women from all kinds of abuses and discriminations. The integration of process theology with Kachin indigenous Nat worship is crucial to develop a Kachin process ecofeminist theology promoting an ecospirituality of justice and earth healing in today's Kachin land. These connections as both spirituality and ethical practice in the actual struggles against corporative violence need to be continually rediscovered and made evident on behalf of the Mother Kachin land and the Kachin people against the global and local dominations. It seeks to contribute to the restoration of Mother Earth's dignity and of the dignity of women and men.

As an innovative, blended, and contextual Christian theology, a Kachin ecofeminist-process-Nat worship spirituality can, therefore, overcome the domination of

men over women, humans over nature, and can solve the problems of sex trafficking to deforestation to poverty, and so on. This constructive Kachin Christian theology shows how a feminist-process-ecological-postcolonial-Nat theology supports Kachin women's ordination. It also promotes not just monogamy over polygamy but rather ways women should be treated in their intimate relationships to rule out polygamy and abusive monogamy. The Kachin Christian community has, therefore, to move from anthropocentrism, a human-centered ideological position toward biocentrism or ecocentrism in order to build transformative ecojustice and an ecologically sustainable Kachin society.

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